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Lessons In and Out of School

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Lessons In and Out of School

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Liberal Studies

By

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December, 2013

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Rollins College

Hamilton Holt School

Master of Liberal Studies Program

Winter Park, Florida

Lessons In and Out of School

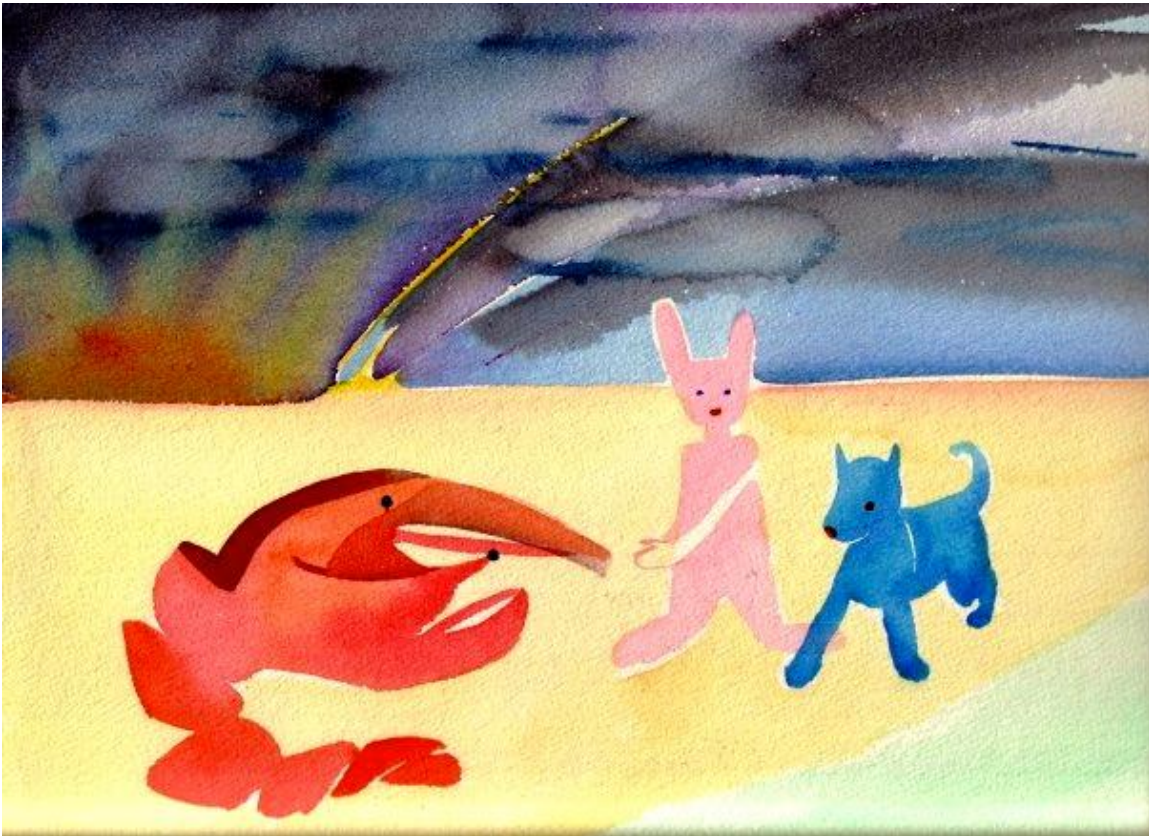


Figure 1

Making Friends on the Beach.

Watercolor (no date)

MK Maloney Johnson

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Thanks

My friend Elizabeth Conley King typed her thesis for the Masters of Liberal Studies in my living room on the typewriter my parents gave me when I graduated from college. Elizabeth then proceeded for the next ten years to bother me with the advice that I, too, should attend the Hamilton Holt School. I signed up after my daughter graduated from college. Elizabeth Conley King got her way. Typical!

I neglected Robert Quintal Sousa Fernandes in the body of my thesis. Robert flipped his lid when he saw my artwork twenty-five years ago. I thought he was crazy. Over the years Robert bought or traded for thirty-five of my paintings. Retired from a Spanish ballet company, Robert took up residence and wrote poetry here in Daytona Beach until passing on to the great Poetry Slam in the Sky. Robert Quintal Sousa Fenandes, I thank you. You are dancing in Heaven with your youth and all your marbles. You encouraged me to go on after all sight of land was lost and, as you predicted, I'm in my fifties.

Colin and Devin Johnson, my son and daughter, thank you for encouraging me. You inspire me and you two are the only ones who know our story.

Eric Breitenbach, thank you for encouraging me, for the photos and the parallel play.

Dr. Lancaster, when you claimed that I ought to begin working on my thesis I felt the shock of being pushed out of the MLS nest. Professor Simmons, you spoke clearly to me about establishing priorities for my thesis. Dr. Siry you are patient, understanding and kind. Thank you. Dr. Carnahan I feel very fortunate that you were willing to advise me. Thank you.

1) Introduction

What are we saying to children when we leave the creativity to others in a visual environment, infused with “attitude”, snobbery, acquisitiveness and Pollyanna innocence? We’re saying that we approve this message. The visual arts teach media literacy in an atmosphere that implicitly uses vices to secure attention. School experiences cannot compete. Parents and teachers, pleading incompetence, pass undiscerning choices on to the next generation.

The subject matter of my thesis involves experimenting with paint and other art materials while under the influence of family, schooling, community and media. Would that I could say, as Arthur Danto did in his preface to *The Abuse of Beauty*, “I have dispensed with footnotes, which, except in the most scholarly of writing on art, constitute a *façade* of craved authority.” I have footnotes and, it’s true, I crave authority. I want to remember who said what, although I mostly won’t. Extemporaneous attribution is a fringe benefit for those who read a lot. Danto’s characterization does not completely fit though. I am compelled to exhibit evidence of references to authorities.¹ Wandering through texts written by people whose knowledge of art is far greater than mine, I find the prospect of writing comments and comparisons about their work daunting. The arbiters of contemporary philosophical and aesthetic judgments in art operate from important institutions in large cities. I find applying their assessments to my artwork difficult partly due to lack of exposure to the dialectics. The objectives I sense about my artwork come from a set of standards that I began internalizing as a child, in art school in the Indiana hinterlands and in encounters with people whose artistic sensibilities

¹ I want this to sound like crossing a border between countries.

influenced my own. The process of this thesis centers on increasing my awareness of the standards with which I judge art making and art teaching.

After studying Modern and Contemporary Art I can say my own work fits within a combination of modernist, post-modernist, symbolist and surrealist traditions. Although I can use the terms as labels, it would be necessary to know more about them in order to convince you, so I'm not going to try to argue that. I identify with individually made "outsider" art even though I cannot be considered entirely naïve because my work is influenced by time spent in art school. I believe artwork ought to speak for itself. Semiotics² says it does, even if we don't understand the languages. Then semiotics says semiotics IS the art which sounds like a hostile take-over. Construing meaning also belongs to the aftermath of making art, as a separate process. Writing about painting does not explain painting. Painting is a different form of expression even if modes of expression are not entirely isolated from each other. Paint is an old fashioned medium, like choosing to drive a Model-T Ford instead of a Prius, a race car, or a space ship.

I identify with the underdog, and often question advantages and compromises endemic to careerism (not just art careerism). One does not have to dig deep to find that I envy the spoils of careerism, even as I tell myself I'm better than it. A few inspiring and comforting literary descriptions come to mind when I think of meaningful influences. First, the words of a speech made by an old man in a political novel by the Nigerian

² Semiotics is a philosophical model that finds meaning lies within the signs and symbols in language and in art. The popular use of the word "narrative" comes from semiotics. Roland Barthes is one of the people associated with the beginning of Semiotics. The contemporary art world defines itself partly through Semiotic standards.

novelist, Chinua Achebe titled *Anthills of the Savannah*.³ The old man defines the role of artists, places our sanity in context and considers the nature of artist's role. Insight establishes authority, as Achebe says, even if an artist "may be a fellow of little account" We observe and translate observations intuitively through our art forms. Second, the long lists of Maxine Hong Kingston's grandfather's work life in *China Men*.⁴ The grandfather's arduous tasks were, many years ago, shocking to my imagination until I became a full-fledged adult and life asked enough of me to feel that I, too, participated in arduous tasks over many years somewhat like Hong-Kingston's grandfather. The third is the description of the physical habits formed by Dr. Manette, the old man who made shoes during his French imprisonment in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. Manette did not readily change his habits after years of imprisonment, he re-enacted the physical limitations and activities he'd performed in imprisonment.

The sense of duty, proud as Catholicism offers to make people for performing tasks of parenthood and daughterhood and the like, my ineffectuality, inability to go forth bravely into these tasks, my sense that I would rather luxuriate and wander than show up and deal with reality diminished any pride of sacrifice I might have gleaned with a better attitude. I developed habits that came to remind me of the wracked helplessness of a Parkinsons-stricken body, the small voice but hopeful heart of my little mama, dwindling. To me, it seemed something like sympathetic pregnancy. The artwork I make now is a way of venturing out of this and other sets of habits created while performing duties. In

³ Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. (New York: Anchor Press, 1987) pp.113-115 (see appendix)

⁴ You would have to read the book, if you haven't, they are dispersed throughout.

many respects my artwork is Walter Mitty style fantasy, but instead of a big demanding wife my foil is a demanding life.

Arthur Danto, art critic of *The Nation* and professor at Columbia University, in his 1986 work *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* threw poor old Art a bone in analyzing Plato's undermining assessment of art as a second order subject. Danto points out that Philosophy itself ultimately fell into a category of ineffectual occupations due to its subordinate relation to Science.⁵ The condition of my role as artist is verified when children occasionally tell me "You are an artist!" but who can trust the experience of the young? They have very little. They also have a stake in pleasing the adults in their lives, so of course they say this. Part of me believes them. After all, income from teaching art has paid my bills and raised my children for many years. Rudolf Arnheim, in his 1969 work *Visual Thinking*, said every level of the educational system neglects art. Arnheim believed that this is due, in part, to art educators' failure to state a convincing case. Overloaded schedules, minimal class time and school systems shedding arts programs show that this remains true today. I owe it to the children and myself to speak on behalf of art.

2) Maloney Life

As a child I noticed aspects of life at home that no one wanted to talk about. As a young adult I could not reconcile the standards of school and family expectations with my own thoughts and experiences. Mama and Daddy were both army officers before I came around. Mama was an army nurse and a veteran of foreign war. She was beautiful,

⁵ Danto, Arthur. *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) pp4-5

like a movie star, fun loving and secretly fragile. Mama bore hidden scars of her service with a daily cocktail hour that sometimes expanded past the hour. She reminded us occasionally, as we headed out the door for school not to talk about things that happened at home. Mama had nightmares all her life, even in her nineties. Daddy was hard of hearing so I went into Mama and Daddy's room in the middle of the night at times to wake her up when I was small.

I made artwork. I did not wonder why. My tendency to stay occupied made me easier to raise, so Mama liked that. In first grade I painted a picture of flowers that filled the big paper edge to edge with violets and lilies and leaves. The flowers were of many varieties, big and pretty and clear until I made a giant rose toward the left and the mistake of adding black for shadows. Even though the paper pilled slightly as I wrestled with it, and the black dulled the red, the over-all effect of the picture was pretty good. Mama took it to a frame shop a couple of years later along with two other pictures and got them nicely framed.

In first grade we were each given a lump of clay, taught to get the air bubbles out, then form the clay into something. I made a seal. I shaped and smoothed it until, to me, at six years old, it seemed exceptionally real looking. I glazed it black. As an adult, the project seemed far lumpier and awkward than I remembered. When my daughter asked permission to take the seal with her to law school my heart smiled over the seal's journey. The first assignment I remember in school involving a scientific nature study required illustrating a red-winged blackbird. Visiting the home of my father's twin brother in Louisville, Kentucky always resulted in time lying around on the living room floor looking at a coffee table book of Audubon illustrations. The project made my heart

sing. I thought my bird was perfect. The drawing disappeared from stockpiles of family mementos, but I remember clearly how it made me feel.

When I was five or six years old I made an apple, a carrot and the head of President Kennedy out of mud from the back yard. When they dried I painted them and put them on a white metal garden cart and wheeled it up the street. I sold them to neighbors for ten cents each. Then I felt embarrassed about it for the next thirty years or so. Maybe it was because President Kennedy was assassinated around that time.

Playing with dolls did not spark my imagination, but it was not for lack of trying. Making a sawhorse into a play riding horse was more exciting. I rarely varied the process. I put a broom on the sawhorse for a tail, a blanket over the broom, skates for feet. The fact that my plan was so flawed caused me to feel let-down as I repeatedly discovered that the skates did not stay on well no matter how I adjusted them for scooting around the basement. Unless I was willing to nail them on, I figured they would not get better. I gave up on that attempted transformation. I loved playing under tables covered with sheets and blankets. I raided my dad's dry-cleaned shirts for shirt boards- the best of all locally available drawing surfaces. I assumed (mistakenly) that artists drew without making mistakes. I tried drawing things that I felt confident about and that I thought artists were supposed to draw. I drew the pheasants on our kitchen drinking glasses, the bowl of plastic fruit. I made up a clown face from left over paint by number paint, and painted a mountain scene. My efforts seemed feeble and although I made many things as a child I did not take my efforts too seriously.

Mama took several of my art works to a framer. We had the pictures home for a few days when a friend of my dad's from work stopped by for a drink. I can see the man,

in my mind's eye, as he stood in the doorway to leave. Mama showed him the newly framed mountains picture. He dropped and broke it. To this day I do not know why I reacted with a scalding feeling of embarrassment.

My grandmother, very famous at our house, came to visit from far away on holidays. When we woke up in the morning, knowing she was there, we ran to her bed and jumped in. We begged her to tell the stories of our father and his twin brother. The stories were full of adventure on army bases from Ft. Robinson, Nebraska, China, Japan, Manila and Chicago. Granddaddy Mike, aka Saturday Night Mike, often told his sons that someone ought to follow him around and write down the things he said. His sons were his subordinates and I imagine he expected them to contribute to basic household functions. Granddaddy Mike liked to drink. He put Daddy and Uncle Mike in charge of making the beer. Nana was no pushover and surely engaged in whatever verbal challenges Granddaddy Mike presented. Nana's stories transported us to long ago, far away places. Daddy and Uncle Mike were three years old when they ruined Nana's chicken hatchery. Daddy launched the bottle across the bar when a bartender handed him soda after Daddy (a pre-schooler) explicitly told him "I want a dink of beer." Nana and her sons traveled the road to Peking by horseback and donkey with a mysterious (to us) soldier at their side.

Nana was a southerner from Chattanooga, Tennessee who went off riding every chance she got. Daddy always said his mother "murdered the King's English" and I knew it was true even when I was young. As the Civil Rights era progressed we saw the televised suffering of people especially across the South, and we knew, and were always to clearly by Mama, that our grandmother's N-word remarks were wrong. Nana traveled

the world on busses, cruise ships and Army transport planes. She lived in “retirement hotels,” mostly big old, unwieldy places that had seen their glory. Mama and Daddy laughed and bragged about Nana’s adventures in advance of her visits then bemoaned her actual presence. They counted the days until time for Nana to leave. They never told Nana if we planned a vacation because they were sure she would insist on riding along. Daddy did not invite her to their wedding because he figured Nana would join them on the honeymoon. Nana blamed Mama for that.

Nana wore garish costume jewelry, exhibited her bust with great pride, expressed her opinions in an often abrasive, cantankerous manner and told thrilling and hilarious stories. Nana told me I was a special person, that I was an old soul and that I was psychic. In those days Nana’s outlook was infused with spiritualism.⁶ Being considered her ally was something of a precarious spot to be in. An especially odd aspect of Nana’s favoritism later seemed evident in my sister’s adventurous, world travelling lifestyle. My sister was far more like Nana than I was and yet Nana was my staunch supporter in the family. My sister, Melissa, also known as Missy, was funny, rambunctious and tough. As an adult she referred to herself as the boy of the family. I was on the fragile side but pretty. Missy ruled. Mama always said I was jealous. I suppose I was.

Nana gave me a copy of *Anderson’s Fairy Tales* for Christmas when I was six or seven and I couldn’t read most of them. Unfortunately the story of The Little Match Girl was one that I read in that collection. I related in a sad way to that child.⁷ The Arthur

⁶ Spiritualism was popular in my grandmother’s era. Born in 1889, she was interested in psychic phenomenon, Christian Science and astrology.

⁷ The little match girl was sent out on a cold winter evening to sell matches. She stands by a window looking in at a beautiful feast laid out on the table, imagining she is inside.

Szyk (pronounced “shick”) illustrations drew my attention. Szyk, a miniaturist, exaggerated musculature and painted faces with a semi-realistic, often mournful look. The illustrations were fabulously colorful. I was in no position to compare them to anything and only knew that I didn’t exactly like, but loved and admired them.⁸ I found out years later that Szyk’s political cartoons inspired soldiers during World War II enough to carry his anti-Nazi illustrations as talismans into battle. I thought of the fairy tale illustrations for years before I got my hands on that book and looked him up.

She uses the matches to warm her hands knowing she will get in trouble when she returns home for not selling them. She freezes to death.

⁸ In high school I cut one out of the book and glued it into the back of a cubby in my desk at home.



Figure 2, The Arthur Szyk Society. Burlingame, CA, www.szyk.org



Figure 3, The Arthur Szyk Society. Burlingame, CA, www.szyk.org

Nana did what she could to make me feel special. My mother considered me shy and overly sensitive. Mama often said my feelings were hurt too easily. Nana considered my “sensitivity” an important quality. When I was little she argued with Mama over my health. I was very thin and Nana wondered if I had tuberculosis. I sat on the steps to the basement and listened to them argue. Mama was offended by Nana’s concerns. Time passed and the next personal incident I remember involving Nana occurred when I was on the verge of becoming a teenager. I opened a Christmas present and found a set of sheer, red nylon harem pajamas from Nana. Mama and Daddy were appalled. I always wished I had saved them.

In fourth grade our teacher set up a wooden rack, organized with lengths of bright yarn grouped by color. She gave us each a big rectangle of burlap and taught us basic embroidery stitches and applique. I cut a red elephant out of cloth and appliqued it, using the blanket stitch. The elephant stands to the right on a green satin stitch hill, an empty lion’s cage on wheels to the left and a yellow balloon floats up. A favorite project, at the age of eight or so, was a bed of nails I made for a school. I sanded a one by eight by ten or twelve inch board then glued nails with flat heads every inch or so, in a grid pattern with the pointed ends up. I painted it all black. I made a snake charmer out of rope. He sat with his legs crisscrossed on the bed of nails in front of a pinch-pot bowl. His head was a walnut and he wore a burlap turban with a jewel made from a green sequin. The snake, also made of rope, rose out of the bowl. It had sequins for eyes. The snake charmer had his arms up, crossed in front of his chest. No flute. Strange, that I made the charmer without a flute because I began playing the flute that year. Maybe I made the swami on

the bed of nails because I was fascinated with the doubling up of the two potentially painful scenarios; nail-bed sitting and poisonous snake bites.

I don't know whether literary and cultural critic Edward Said approved of Jungian thinking or if he figured Carl Jung's work facilitated bastardization of the "other."⁹ Would he consider my bed of nails project evidence of one generation's passing the sense of "otherness" on to the next? Our house was accentuated with many objects from China and the Philippine Islands. My grandfather was a supply sergeant in the army, which made it easy for my grandmother to send home things she wanted. The presence of paper-thin Rose Medallion china and mind-boggling Filipino wood carvings influenced my personal artistic interests and standards. These objects were considered the most valuable among my family's possessions, but I believe their value was as much in regard to the story of the time spent in Asia as any monetary value. My grandmother referred to the people as though they were only there to perform subservient roles.

I did not think of my projects as art. I made them, that's all there was to it. Now that I think of them I see that they were art. I know I was proud of them and that especially the embroidery carried over into work years later and even today. I continued embroidering, over the years, won a first place ribbon in the Pennsylvania Maryland Interstate Fair for embroidery when I was in high school and put sewing and design skills to use later in college costume design classes. I was very proud of taking senior and graduate level costume design courses as a freshman and sophomore in college.

⁹ Edward Said wrote about the misinterpretations and assumption-filled regard the West developed for Asian art in his book titled. Said believes that Asian culture is treated as "the other", that the West dismisses (or dismissed) as inferior, cultures from the Arabs to far eastern Asia.

Visual material around our house included Walt Kelly's Pogo stories. Kelly's drawings were fanciful and humorous, relaxed anthropomorphic cartoon realism. I never tried drawing in Kelly's style and never bothered imagining I could fathom his drawing skill. I felt happy to learn years later that Bill Watterson attributed Calvin and Hobbes's style to Walt Kelly's influence. Watterson's work, like Kelly's, exemplifies humor united with art. *Put Me in the Zoo*, Robert Lopshire, was an absolute favorite. The spots on the aspiring zoo animal changed and changed and when they became all colors, I was thrilled. I read Dr. Seuss over and over, of course. The love I felt for those books established a basis for comparison, and instilled humorous, friendly character standards in making judgments in my own artwork.

We lived in St. Louis. The schools took us to museums. The city was known for its famous zoo in Forest Park where the Muni Opera staged outdoor shows in the summer. These and experiences of seeing movies in an old, ornate theater in the heart of St. Louis formed a great deal of my early impressions of art. At some point I told myself, before sixth grade, as we stood looking at paintings on a class trip, "I could do that." As a teenager I drew awkwardly labored anatomically incorrect cartoons for the high school newspaper. I had a slight knack for portraiture; the epitome of which was a drawing of my art teacher's head placed on the body of a duck. The resemblance was uncanny. I hand-built pottery and pored over useless details. I embroidered and made clothing, at first from patterns and then invented designs. I thought of creative work as something I liked doing. This carried over into my life as a student until in a drawing class in college where class assignments revealed that I was capable of finer drawing and that I could learn to draw.

3) Most Pretentious Inclinations

The National Endowment for the Arts discouraged its board from choosing painters among its grantees by the time I graduated from art school in 1981.¹⁰ Rumor had it that Penn State did not accept women in their painting program even into the seventies when I tried to figure out where to study. I did not interpret the idea that a painting program at a flagship university rejecting women meant anything outside of particularly stubborn stupidity in a particular institution. I didn't want to attend a big school anyway. My mother had set an example for independence. Mama, after all, waded onto Utah Beach in the Invasion of Normandy. Feminism seemed reactionary. I mistakenly made the assumption that there were no issues for me to deal with in that regard. Many experiences later proved that I was willingly susceptible to compromising my own rights. I dove into a relationship at the age of nineteen with the brilliant, unstable, addiction-prone artist I eventually married. I figured I was primed for such a role by my place within the Maloney family and didn't, wouldn't or couldn't look at bigger issues in society nor forgive myself for timid, fearful behavior in which I was more often an observant, compliant bystander than an active participant in life.

When I realized that men made the vast majority of work in the art history books I felt dismal. The dearth of women induced fatalistic thinking. Perhaps giving in to fatalism also owes something to my father's influence. A little sticker, left in the frame of a caricature drawn in New Orleans of Daddy sitting at a bar drinking a beer, says "No one is more humble than me." I thought about that for years. My feeling now is that it was something of a Catholic in-joke. Daddy said his father often derided him and his twin

¹⁰ Munson, Lynn. *Exhibitionism*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000) p64.

brother. Granddaddy Mike claimed his sons would never equal him. Daddy conveyed this to me in a conversation in the car one day. His father's comments obviously stung but could be placed in perspective by considering Granddaddy Mike's drinking habits. My father admonished me whenever he detected hubris. I did not realize that for me, a female, the idea that I could become an artist looked like hubris. I told Daddy a time or two that I was going to do something very important when I grew up. He shook his head, seemed slightly bemused, and advised against that way of thinking.

My undergrad professors studied in the forties and fifties courtesy of the GI Bill. They were known, before my time at the school, for drinking heavily and carousing. Many of their students studied at the art school on the GI Bill after Viet Nam. The Ft. Wayne Art Institute was housed in a group of Victorian buildings that filled most of a square block downtown. The professors were generally modernists, some formalists. The printmaking professor believed that the Renaissance was the downfall of Western culture, that the fleshy realism of Renaissance art indicated a departure from spiritual to material values. All of the professors originally studied art in a traditional way. They were all men. They learned to draw from life and in turn made life drawing an integral part of the curriculum.

Our painting and drawing classes began at nine in the morning and ended at four in the afternoon. An old Russian artist named Ilya Bolotowsky once visited the school, looked at my paintings and advised me to avoid imagery and to always work on many paintings at once. Although I tried to take his advice I found representational content (or potential) very interesting. The fact that we attempt to find meaning in imagery does not necessarily mean that the particularities of an artist's personal associations become

meaningful to viewers. Viewers, by their independent existence, make their own associations and identify with implied content according to their own experiences.

A cartoon by Ghost World's author/artist Daniel Clowes expresses a common feature of the art school experience. The caption says "If you must go to art school FOR GOD'S SAKE make the most of it... seldom if ever again in life will you be afforded the chance to scrutinize such an array of losers in an environment that actually encourages their most pretentious inclinations."¹¹ Why try justifying painting choices according to contemporary art standards? Insignificance lacks appeal, for one reason. According to Lynn Munson, by the late nineteen seventies, under the direction of James Melcher, the National Endowment for the arts began granting financial support to artists whose work dealt with "radical research into the nature of art."¹² Munson says the National Endowment began rejecting artists who made work conceived as building on the art of the past. Munson interprets the Endowment's priorities as an indication that anyone who believed painting is not dead should not bother applying for grant money. Munson claimed, at the time of publication (2000), that a handful of schools carried on a painterly tradition. Among them, Munson includes Indiana University, a little branch of which is my alma mater where drawing, painting and art history "comprise the basic curriculum." Arthur Danto said beauty was no longer among National Endowment for the Arts criteria by 1965. The NEA found artists' ideas potentially helpful for fighting the cold war.¹³ According to Professor James Elkins, Professor at the Art Institute of Chicago, artist, educator and author of (among many other works), *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*, the

¹¹ Lowes, Daniel. *Twentieth Century Eightball*. (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2002) p7

¹² Munson, 64

¹³ Danto, Arthur. *The Abuse of Beauty*. (Chicago: Open Court, 2003) p. 26

centers of culture generate styles and concepts from which regional schools derive their work.¹⁴ Digital dissemination especially lends itself, according to Elkins, to conceptual and text based art forms.

4) Art Teacher

I teach art to children. This is a fact of my life that involves habits, memory, observation, and attention to children's interests. Teaching art to children, after many years, feels like riding a bicycle. I wanted to love my artwork when I was a kid and I did not always love it. I was aware of its flaws and did not know what to do about them. I encourage children to get what they have in mind on paper. Talking too much about the subject of their work usually overreaches children's technical ability so that the story becomes what they are "doing" instead of trying their hand with materials. Children's art might be considered outsider art. I have had the great fortune of spending many years around their work.

Schools test competence in math, reading, science and social studies. After higher education and the states chew, digest and evacuate educational material, school systems take up the result and offer it to children. Evidence suggests that elementary education is "the last to know" and not the least interested that the arts lend themselves as propaganda tools. Coca Cola wields great and wonderful powers (yes, like the Wizard of Oz) because the company produces high budget, finely crafted ads. Although the majority of the art we experience serves commercial interests, public schools do not prioritize educating students in discernment processes pertaining to the capitalist media environment. When

¹⁴ James Elkins, email message to author, October 4th, 2013.

children produce art projects to take home most people are happy. The fact that teachers and families are satisfied with art as-is does not eliminate the facts that our environments can be studied and interpreted in forms outside the purview of the majority of practice and memorization tasks. Art, like science, best involves direct observation not only for the sake of imitating life for but for observing the results of our actions with the materials we handle.

One wonderful fact is that teachers frequently use children's literature. Many intellectually and artistically serious artists illustrate children's literature.¹⁵ The choices teachers make do not always exhibit discernment between the great and the so-so. According to Susan Gannon, art theory can help establish critical understanding of children's book illustration. Gannon, in 1984, said she would like to see a "rhetoric of illustration" and considered Rudolf Arnheim's writing a pioneering effort. Gannon felt that people trained in literary criticism could refer to Arnheim's work. Arnheim's Gestalt criteria for observing and interpreting emphasize the viewer's perception of the work; that the perception created in the viewer is the work of art, not the paint. Arnheim says, in his introduction to *Art and Visual Perception* (1954), "We have neglected the gift of comprehending things through our senses. Concept is divorced from percept, and thought

¹⁵ Marcus, Leonard. *Margaret Wise Brown: Awakened by the Moon*. (Harper Collins, New York:1992) p91. Margaret Wise Brown's illustrator, Clement Hurd studied in Paris with Ferdinand Leger at the Academie Moderne. He and Margaret Wise Brown were friends with Carl Van Vechten, the Barrymores and others associated with patronage of the Harlem Renaissance. Stonor Suanders, Frances, *The Cultural Cold War*. (New Press, New York 1999) Many blacklisted artists in the cold war era made their living in the field of children's literature. Long lasting and broadly effective work created under the children's literature category allows political freedom of speech and social commentary in ways that work written for the adult population may face publishers' rejection.

moves among abstractions.”¹⁶ Gannon says art theorists rarely discuss illustration and particularly neglect children’s book illustration.¹⁷

Pursuit of entertainment, comfort and happiness often tempt compromise in learning. I recently learned of the word sybaritic. In art classes many children desire a luxuriously effortless experience, a sybaritic experience. Many parents expect art classes to provide effortless enjoyment. In English, do the parents expect children to randomly toss words onto a page? Children develop conventions for representation and claim the symbolic figures as their own. The images stand for a girl, boy, dog, flower or whatever the subject. Many children refer to them as “mine,” as “the way I do it.” After a time, for some children, the symbols develop into the flexible beginnings from which they learn anatomy and gesture. They begin observing once more and elaborating on their basic set of conventions. More often, however, children skip the expansion of their art when they become aware that, unlike the details of math problems or other school tasks, classmates see their work instantly and know if they struggle or fail.

Elementary children typically attend art class once a week, so students attend only four days of Art class in a month. How competent in English, Math and Social Studies would the average adult become if classes were limited to once a week? Schools and entire states schedule classes so that Art Education’s (extracurricular) dual purpose creates planning time for those who teach other classes. Teachers often encourage

¹⁶ Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception* (University of California Press, Berkley: 1954) Introduction.

¹⁷ Gannon, Susan. “Rudolf Arnheim’s ‘Psychology of the Creative Eye’ and the Criticism of Illustrated Books for Children. *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 9,no.1 (1984):15-18

students' doubts. Many teachers study very little Art and never develop their own sense of artistic competence.

Today's artists' departures from representational work remain misunderstood. Such misjudging is similar to evolution's path toward orthodoxy in the sciences and reluctant redefining of Christianity's explanations. The average teacher and school administrator assume that only the "talented" fathom rules of perspective and have the ability to create resemblance. Perspective's status in art went from glorious Renaissance accomplishments to something more like a necessary step in developing the ability to freely express one's self. This transition was something of a fall from grace or maybe a fall from honor, but mediums change. Photography made hand made observation tasks unnecessary. Art's subjects and material expression changed due to the advent of photography, the power of motion pictures and now digital media.

Most Americans who learn far more material in other subjects become adults who lack grounding in performance and historical aspects of the arts.¹⁸ As Arnheim says "The arts tell the student about the significance of direct experience and of his own response."¹⁹ College level art education students today do not always learn observational drawing. Ineptitude in observational work passes from generation to generation as though the phenomena of incompetence were some sort of charming anomaly rather than the result of neglect. Students, inundated with artistic creations in dazzling technological distractions sweep through present day life. Technology constantly raises educational expectations, reproducing massive, random sources of information, imagery and

¹⁸ Performance in this case means handling and experimenting with materials, practicing common tasks in two and three-dimensional arts, but also in music and theater arts.

¹⁹ Arnheim, Rudolf. *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) p301

inspiration from the sublime to the ridiculous. Newness masks ignorance with bells and whistles. Why do the schools co-conspire? In failing to prioritize media literacy standards the schools commit what in the Catholic world is called a sin of omission. Schools leave it up to random gleanings of news reporters' stories concerning intentionally addictive games, planned fads, carefully timed roll outs of technological improvements, constant turnover of styles and the necessity of creating desire since so few products are actually necessary.²⁰ Years ago a loud cry went up when the public learned about planned obsolescence. Educators (who know enough to do so) cry out for instilling heuristic integrity but somehow media literacy is not yet part of the curriculum.

5) Picture Books

Unfortunately for the schools, graphic design made for classroom reproduction indicates negligible training in life drawing, exposure to art history and even education history. As a teacher, one of the more enjoyable tasks for me at the beginning of each year once entailed using a small amount of credit at a local teaching supply store. As an art teacher, the problem for me was always that the reproducible materials books revealed a terrible lack of proportion, not just uninteresting style, but downright obnoxiously cutesy, poorly drawn imagery. Copy machines provide cheap, profuse reproduction and yet the market in non-photographic, black and white reproducible illustrations typically results in material ranging in quality from ho-hum to irritating. The opinion I express here pertains especially to consumable materials used in day-to-day work with students. Consumable school materials prior to the era of the copy machine were either hand

²⁰ *The Ad and the Ego*, Video, directed by Harlod Boihem (1996: San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel)

drawn/written by teachers (more forgivable) or professionally illustrated and printed by publishing companies with higher standards. Classroom teachers seem unfazed, unaware and uninterested in the fact that the materials they present to children teach lousy extra-curricular, unintended lessons. No over-reaching aspirations!

Text books, faithfully purchased and frequently replaced, catch the eye of teachers with flashy graphic design. According to Rebecca Jones, a senior editor of the American School Board Journal, visually loud educational buzzwords often stand in place of content.²¹ The worst materials lack elegance as well as substance. Jones offers the contrasting example of a Japanese chemistry book; text-dense, 170 pages, 5”X7”, with little white space. Portable and significantly less expensive printing than our glossy, glitzy tastes allow could save schools a lot of money and lighten backpacks. We apparently choose text books in a fashion similar to the visual temptations involved in choosing cereal boxes from store shelves without considering their weight.

Margaret Wise Brown, the author best known for *Goodnight Moon*, made her way into the children’s literature business pre-World War II during a conflict between two important educational philosophies. One camp supported the idea that writers can scientifically devise combinations of age appropriate words and subject matter according to the interests of children. The other camp favored the appeal of classical literature and children’s affinity for the poetic and the imaginative.²² Columbia University’s Bank Street School and the New York Public Library’s Children’s Collection competed for

²¹ Jones, Rebecca. *U.S. Textbooks are long on glitz, but where’s the beef?* (Education Digest 66.6, 2001): 23-30.

²² Marcus, *Awakened by the Moon*. 69

dominance.²³ Any book chosen for inclusion in the library's new acquisitions meant financial success for the publisher. Happily, both approaches worked well and each perspective produced good work. Dr. Seuss, for example, did very well with publishers' demands for books using specific words provided in a list by finding two words that rhymed; "cat" and "hat" with uncompromising imaginative integrity.²⁴

Artistically and scientifically fine children's literature includes Holling Clancy Holling's illustrated books on natural history. The stories begin with fictionalized adventures with finely drawn animals, maps, "exploded" drawings illustrating the construction of man-made materials and structural properties of natural scenery. Clancy's books follow animal characters through stories and drawings that introduce children to typical lives and habitats. Holling graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago and worked in taxidermy at Chicago's Field Museum.

²³ Marcus, p 55

²⁴ Gatto, John Taylor. *The Underground History of American Education*. (The Oxford Village Press, New York: 2001) 73



Figure 4 *Tree in the Trail*, Chapter 20, Holling C. Holling

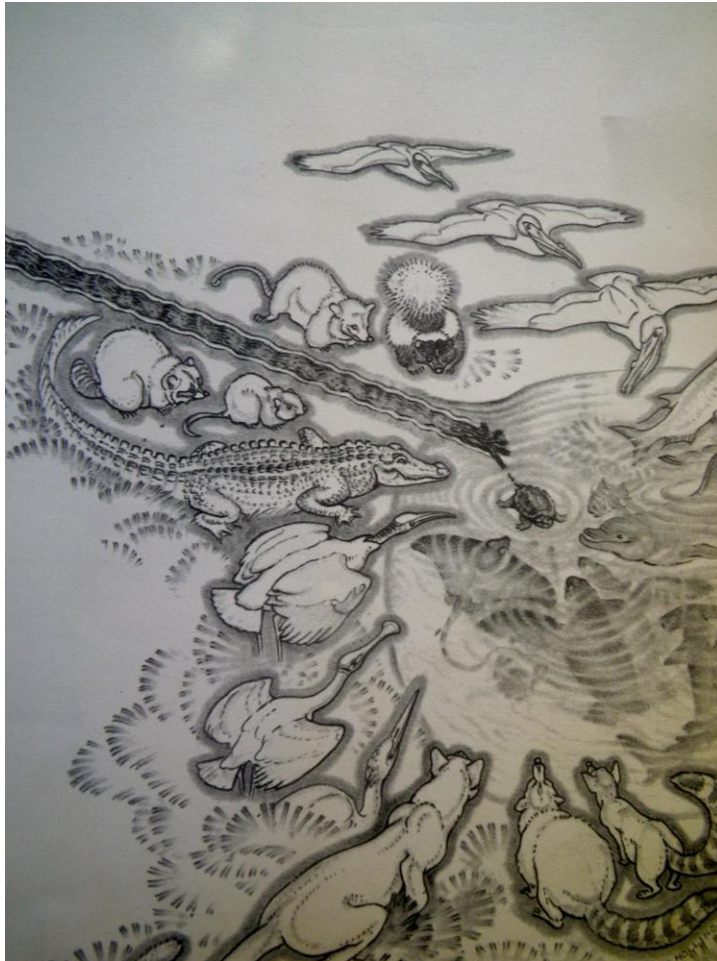


Figure 5 *Minn of the Mississippi* (frontispiece) Holling C. Holling

The author/artist Robert McClosky, well known for *Make Way for Ducklings*, studied art in Boston and New York. Preparing for his most famous book McClosky studied ducks, kept them in his studio and drew many views before committing the drawings to storybook form. H.A Rey, who wrote and illustrated the *Curious George* books, also illustrated the constellations. Cecily Mary Barker, author of the *Flower Fairies* books sketched, drew and painted portraits of children all her life. Barker's delicately drawn children and nature studies become more real than simply accurate because they illustrate children's imaginative qualities as well as parental fascination with children's loveliness.

Present day author/illustrator Richard McGuire simplifies color and wrangles with digitally designed flatness while tying in comical wording that tells fanciful cause and effect stories. McGuire allows the story- words and pictures to have each their own version of the action. The artwork of illustrator Amy Walrod, in *The Little Red Hen Makes a Pizza* and other works exemplify fine inventive and humorous paper collage illustration.

These artists represent a tiny set of contrasting styles amongst the many artists who've done wonderful work in the past and living artists who do so today. The point is that with fine work readily available there's never a reason to use poor examples. Fine work is available in an immense array of styles and subjects. What seems lacking is a process through which teachers develop discernment. One of the more wonderful companies representing a number of fine picture book artists is the artist's agency Studio Goodwin Strugis, founded by Rhode Island School of Design graduate, Judy Sue Godwin Sturgis.²⁵

6) Antique Examples of Educational Artwork

Ernst Haeckel drew and painted pictures of microscopic sea life too fantastic to be real and too real to be made up. Robert J. Richards, Professor of the History of Science and Medicine at the University of Chicago, describes accusations of fraud and arrogance launched at Ernst Haeckel. Throughout Richard's book *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, Richard says Haeckel attracted

²⁵ <http://www.studiogoodwinsturges.com/>

followers among students and colleagues. Haeckel also provoked rancor among representatives of his profession.²⁶ Part of a broad determination to refute Haeckel came from the fact that he fought fiercely to establish evolutionary theory and to disseminate it in a time freshly provoked by the contrast of Christian views with Darwin's research. Naturalists and Christians of Haeckel's time found radically atheistic views offensive. Many people engaged in personal struggles with theological issues.²⁷

Haeckel found his life's work studying, classifying and drawing microscopic varieties of complex, single cell "radiolaria." Haeckel called the waters of Messina "the Eldorado of Zoology."²⁸ In response to his fiancée's Christian encouragement Haeckel said that the fruit of the tree of knowledge makes losing paradise worthwhile.²⁹ Married for eighteen months, Haeckel, in a single day received a prestigious academic award for his work and lost his wife to an unexpected illness.³⁰ Haeckel's original romantically generous grounding changed. He argued in defense of his work with deep cynicism against anything straying from evolutionary orthodoxy.

Haeckel did not anticipate societies falling apart. Nor did he know how pervasively the material of the earth; plant, animal and ecology would soon begin failing. Haeckel coined the term "ecology" but did not predict the social consequences of scientific discovery and industrialization combined with changes in human migration,

²⁶ Richards, Robert. *The Tragic Sense of Life*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) p16.

Richards borrows the title from a book by the same name written by Spanish intellectual Miguel de Unamano whose work challenged Catholic perspectives of his time. Biologists later disproved a famous Haeckel phrase "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" in the early twentieth century.

²⁷ Is there ever a time that people don't?

²⁸ Richards, 63 Contradictory information exists concerning the number of life forms.

²⁹ Ibid., 56

³⁰ Ibid., 105-106

exploitation of natural resources and uprooting of innumerable human traditions.³¹

Instead, Haeckel lambasted naturalist perpetrators of (what he considered) theological illusions. People often cite personal tragedy as proof that God does not exist. How can we imagine that the personal tragedy of Haeckel's experience did not influence his fight against Christian views on nature? The idea of undoing centuries of thought about nature's mutability in one short life span proved unfeasible and unwise.

Later, economic and social conditions in Germany created National Socialism. The Nazis appropriated Haeckel's research to back eugenics as scientific justification for everything from medical experiments to genocide.³² Creationists today point to Haeckel's vitriolic attitude toward religion as evidence that evolutionary theory represses creationist views and violates the right to religious freedom.

Some idea exists that the German version of Art Nouveau, Jugendstil, influenced Haeckel's inventively elegant drawings.³³ Haeckel's subject matter often seems suspended in the swirling movement of water. Because Art Nouveau began as late in the nineteenth century as it did, it seems the Art Nouveau style itself may have been as much influenced by Haeckel as he was by it.³⁴ In recent years publishers reproduced Haeckel's visual work in inexpensive books and posters making the images, once again, widely

³¹ Wheeler, Reuben. *Man, Nature and Art*. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1968), 62-67

³² Richards, p 332 and Appendix Two "The Moral Grammar of Narratives in the History of Biology- the Case of Haeckel and Nazi Biology", pp 489-512.

³³ Haeckel Ernst. *Art Forms in Nature*. (New York: Prestel, 2011) p14

³⁴ Haeckel, p15. Olaf Breidbach's "Brief Instructions to Viewing Haeckel's Pictures" notes that research shows proof of Haeckel's influence in Jugendstil. According to Rene Binet, the architect who designed the entranceway to the Paris World Exposition of 1900; everything about the design is influenced by Haeckel's studies. Haeckel also influenced the work of Louis Comfort Tiffany.

available. Reproductions of Haeckel's visual studies today are more easily found in homes than in schools, as sea life themes for interior decorating.

Haeckel's work and life experience bring to mind several things. First- his effort, in my opinion, was so clear and fine that it has never been equaled. Second- the work is readily available and valuable not only because of its place in the history of science but because it exemplifies a truth of our era often encountered by those who attempt to teach Art. The sustained concentration and elegant evidence of an individual's work is quite shocking to the comparatively fumbling hands of people today. The most common example of this might be the difference between the average person's handwriting now and handwritten material of even marginally educated people a couple of generations back. Third- seeing this kind of work makes me want to buy a microscope and see what's around my own neighborhood, increase the patience with which I practice my artwork, and keep in mind that relationships with loved ones will never be less important than any work I might do.

Science illustrations that once educated botany and biology students (as well as children whose schools could afford them) can still serve students well today. According to Katrien Van der Schueren's introduction to her Chronicle Books's *The Art of Instruction* (2011) the abundance of classroom posters stored away never cataloged, lay stored away in the attics of schools for years. Now people search them out for homes and for the marketplace. Art's traditional "higher calling" representing grand historical themes, commentary and quasi-scientific observation settles for smaller subjects in nature study. Naturalists made aesthetically pleasing studies from the microscopic to the

immense. The best exemplify art in the service of science. This kind of work hurts nothing, except, perhaps, the vanity of Art that wants to be about itself.

Science education posters, first manufactured in Germany around 1820, became popular for classroom use. The late eighteenth hundreds through the early nineteenth hundreds became considered a Golden Age of the art of illustration.³⁵ Nature studies retained innocent, romantic qualities. According to Julia Mickenberg, the nature study movement influenced children's literature well into the twentieth century. Some of the work, according to Mickenburg, encouraged appreciation of nature more than offering accurate depiction.³⁶

Artists and craftspeople whose work was stultified by the industrial revolution attempted to preserve their calling and practices associated with their crafts. This was true of Daniel Carter Beard's 1882 work *The American Boy's Handy Book*. This book meant so much to the life of our household that as my son's friends' birthdays came around we gave each of them a copy. The book describes crafts common to boyhood in hope of preserving them for generations to come. Daniel Beard filled his book with illustrations and instructions from cover to cover for making blowguns, slingshots, snares, building fires for outdoor cooking, boats, shelters and games of all sorts.³⁷ *The American Boy's*

³⁵ Van der Schueren. *The Art of Instruction, Vintage Educational Charts from the 19th and 20th Centuries*. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011) pp. 6-7. The years described as "the golden age of illustration vary by country. They also vary according to the purposes for which they were devised. The golden age of magazine illustration, for instance, is later.

³⁶ Dover Books Pictorial Archives make our current freedom to use materials from these years inestimably grand. Renderings of plant life from 19th century sources are generally clearer and more accurate than renderings of animals (especially exotic animals). Most classroom teachers, however, sadly remain unaware of them.

³⁷ Beard, Daniel Carter. *The American Boy's Handybook, What to do and How to Do it*. (Rutland Vermont: Charles Tuttle and Company, 1971) Beard's illustrations came to the

Handy Book is the original Boy Scout manual, perfect company for wanderings through the natural world that once taught and entertained children. Schools, of course, would not want any part of it. A close friend tells the story of her years of growing up in a household in which only two books existed- the Bible, which they studied, and *The American Boy's Handy Book*, which they were not allowed to read. On sick days at home my friend (and each of her sisters in turn) hid in the closet and read the book, later secretly shared the contraband knowledge amongst themselves.

attention of Mark Twain, who asked him to illustrate *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Beard got in trouble for depicting some of the villains as industrialist robber barons of the day.

7) "Collect Them All!"

THE KID IN UPPER 4

It is 3:42 a.m. on a troop train.
Men wrapped in blankets are breathing heavily.
Two in every lower berth. One in every upper.
This is no ordinary trip. It may be their last in the U.S.A. till the end of the war.
Tomorrow they will be on the high seas.
One is wide awake . . . listening . . . staring into the blackness.
It is the kid in Upper 4.

☆ ☆ ☆
Tonight, he knows, he is leaving behind a lot of little things—and big ones.
The taste of hamburgers and pop . . . the feel of driving a roadster over a six-lane highway . . . a dog named Shucks, or Spot, or Barnacle Bill.
The pretty girl who writes so often . . . that gray-haired man, so proud and awkward at the station . . . the mother who knit the socks he'll wear soon.
Tonight he's thinking them over.
There's a lump in his throat. And maybe—a tear fills his eye. *It doesn't matter, Kid. Nobody will see . . . it's too dark.*

☆ ☆ ☆
A couple of thousand miles away, where he's going, they don't know him very well.
But people all over the world are waiting, praying for him to come.
And he will come, this kid in Upper 4.
With new hope, peace and freedom for a tired, bleeding world.

☆ ☆ ☆
Next time you are on the train, remember the kid in Upper 4.
If you have to stand enroute—it is so he may have a seat.
If there is no berth for you—it is so that he may sleep.
If you have to wait for a seat in the diner—it is so he . . . and thousands like him . . . may have a meal they won't forget in the days to come.
For to treat him as our most honored guest is the least we can do to pay a mighty debt of gratitude.

THE NEW HAVEN R.R.

★ SERVING THE GREAT INDUSTRIAL STATES OF MASSACHUSETTS, RHODE ISLAND AND CONNECTICUT ★

FOR VICTORY
BUY
UNITED
STATES
WAX
BONDS
AND
STAMPS

Figure 6 Early World War II ad devised to secure public cooperation for train schedule disruptions caused by troop movements. From Julian Watkin's *The One Hundred Greatest Advertisements*. Reprinted with permission by Dover Publications.

During World War II, Frank Capra, the renowned director of *It's a Wonderful Life* and many other films, made some of the most effective pro-war propaganda for newsreels.³⁸ War requires many social engineering tasks.³⁹ Great filmmakers joined the war effort to secure public sympathy, uniting art with the social sciences.⁴⁰

We more frequently associate artists with “lone wolf” rebellious roles despite the fact that the vast majority of people in the arts operate under the auspices of ruling class interests. The 1960’s attempt at splitting off of the younger generation from the previous generation created plenty of conflict in my own life. I admired my parents’ military service and found it frightening, as though they lived their experiences in black and white but war changed to color during my childhood.

Science, according to Julia Mickenberg, was the most popular subject among authors of children’s literature after World War Two. School science became oriented toward serving military and corporate purposes. In 1958 a bill was signed in Congress allotting funds for science and math education.⁴¹ Senator Joseph McCarthy tried to make leftist scientists unemployable; from the common classroom teacher to the likes of Robert Oppenheimer.

³⁸ *Why We Fight*, DVD, Directed by Frank Capra (1942-1944 US Armed Services, Good Times Video 2001)

³⁹ Watkins, Julian. *The 100 Greatest Advertisements, Who Wrote Them and What They Did*. (New York: Dover Books, 1959)

⁴⁰ Mariner, Rosemary. *The Atomic Bomb and American Society: New Perspectives*. (The University of Tennessee Press/ Knoxville. 2009) 329-341

⁴¹ National Defense Education Act 1958. Public Law 85- 864, Sept. 2nd, 1958 page 1580

Under McCarthy's radar, books challenged prevailing ideology and used dialectical reasoning to analyze cold-war assumptions.⁴² Many of these books became popular in schools; libraries purchased them with federal funds. The general idea was that studying science would encourage students to think for themselves. Writers refrained from using certain key words associated with leftist political messages. The content came through, nonetheless. Messages about rights and interests concerning common working people permeated the writing. Many of the titles Mickenberg mentions were in the school libraries of my own childhood. Mickenberg does not mention *Pippi Longstockings*, by the Swedish author Astrid Lindgren. The pigtailed girl, with an absent seafaring father, who lived entirely on her own captured my imagination, appears in my artwork and may be one of the reasons I find that life alone sparks my imagination today. I bought my house, for instance, from a retired sea captain and the house itself reminds me of a small, space efficient ship.



Figure 7 Pippi, 1978 Watercolor
MK Maloney Johnson

⁴² Mickenberg, Julia L. *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*. (Oxford University Press, 2006) eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) p 177



Figure 8 Pippi 2013 Watercolor by MK Maloney Johnson

The new realities related to nuclear warfare greatly influenced American society early in the Cold War. People heard about anti-aircraft arms in the papers, on the news, in advertisements and films. People were afraid that another “Pearl Harbor” might occur.⁴³

Children collected Nike Hercules trading cards from cereal boxes. Revell Inc., a toy company, used declassified blueprints in designing accurate models for children to build.

⁴³ On the extra-curricular “societal” education front, a Beverly Hills company run by Colonel Barney Oldfield planned a film starring Jimmy Stewart. Oldfield sought federal funds for a production about nuclear testing. Oldfield also happened to be Ronald Reagan’s publicist at Warner Brothers. The Army announced in 1957 the impending deployment of surface to air Nike-Hercules and air to air Genie and Falcon missiles. A PR campaign began, meant to convey the sense that these were devised to guard the free world. Timmy and Lassie visited a base in the Los Angeles area.

Each year Revell produced fifty or sixty replicas of military hardware.⁴⁴ Today stores sell toy weapons of every imaginable variety and simply don't allow children to take them to school. Our fears over practicing for nuclear attacks probably does not rival the chilling prospect school children must feel today in school lock-down practices. When I was young, violence appeared in my artwork more than it does now. Perhaps age and motherhood influenced me to turn away that fascination. I desired strength in my youth, wanted to face the frightening aspects of life, and avoid vulnerability. My artwork, now less dramatic and more orderly, retains mysterious imagery, albeit less threatening.

A chapter in *Figments of Reality, the Evolution of the Curious Mind*, titled "The Reductionist Nightmare" states the following:

To many people, science is seen as a source of certainty, a box full of answers that can be trotted out when dealing with life's many questions. Most working scientists, however, see their subject in a very different light: as a method for navigating effectively in an uncertain world. Whatever science may be, it is not just a matter of assembling 'the facts'. The outside world seldom presents us with unequivocal facts; instead it provides a variety of indicators whose interpretation is usually open to debate.⁴⁵

This description sounds very similar to the way I think and feel about my own process of making art. I find that I gain insight and that I handle life better through making artwork. Artwork adds "my two cents" to the conversation whether anyone sees it or not. The question of whether it is necessary for others to see it may be one of the more perturbing questions. Would others benefit from seeing my artwork? I will continue painting either way. The impracticality of art, the time consuming aspects, the private jokes, sorrows, sympathies, problems,

⁴⁴ Mariner, *The Atomic Bomb and American Society*. 332

⁴⁵ Stewart, Ian. *The Evolution of the Curious Mind*. (Cambridge University Press: 1997) p33

solutions and confusion fascinate me. To many people art is a source of images that imitate reality to be trotted out for decorative use. To me, and to many artists, art is not a matter of creating resemblance, nor beauty, nor information. The visible aspects of the world are only various versions of the world's appearance, each aspect is open to interpretation and debate.

8) Duchamp and Blindsight

Eric Kandel, director of the Center of Neurobiology and Behavior and winner of the Nobel Prize in Physiology, says Freud was convinced that the dynamic unconscious “draws no distinction between fantasy and reality.”⁴⁶ Art work never stays sealed within a unique form. Contextual histories in Art find ideas attributable to clearly definable art historical categories as well as hardly fathomable personal miscellany. Years ago I painted a sign for the Art Room quoting a Bahamian artist named Amos Ferguson. He said “I paint not by sight but by faith. Faith gives you sight.” When I paint I have no idea where a painting is going. I have faith that the habits I learn and ones I developed over the years guide me, but they always begin with blank paper and no particular conscious intention other than a desire to make something I like.

According to Arthur Danto, art supported by the National Endowment for the Arts stopped referring to beauty in the nineteen seventies.⁴⁷ Art may not need to explain anything and may not need interpretation, may not need to create aesthetic experiences. Art may simply exist physically. The purpose or lack of purpose from artist to artist and era-to-era can lead to the conclusion that there's no reason for anyone, ever again, to

⁴⁶ Kandel, Eric. *The Age of Insight*. (New York: Random House, 2012) p57

⁴⁷ Design takes up aesthetics where art leaves off. People still want beauty and uphold many standards of beauty in their personal and business lives even if “The Arts” per se consider beauty old hackneyed subject matter of the past.

paint a picture. Painting still, however, can deal with personal, psychological, political, moral, scientific and aesthetic subject matter.

Art and Science both observe and analyze observations. Science sentimentalizes only in the sense that it may cling to pre-existing theories in a way that creates political and practical difficulty for new or unfamiliar observers and their observations. Art does the same thing. Art also serves as a standard bearer for any cause; including those of the sciences. Particular symbols suit particular causes. In illustration, art becomes something of an employee; used effectively and sometimes misused egregiously. Art that serves the purposes of other disciplines also perpetrates their unintended consequences.

Predicting the persistence of technical trends is a long way from predicting their social consequences. When we move from the former to the latter, our confidence drops... There are trends in social and political structure that more or less follow trends in technology.⁴⁸

Historicism involves the idea that we can gain insight into future events through recognizing patterns across time. Historicism happened in the example of Third Reich superstitions justifying racial persecution or in a fortuitous form among the Enlightenment-era founders of the United States, baseball players winning when they wear lucky socks, all can be thought of as influenced by “historicist superstitions.” Historicism in art happens when we assume that the art of the present builds on the art of the past. Arnheim’s studies, however, pertained to retinal effects. He was not assessing historical context. Somehow immersed art scholars defy the repression, question the

⁴⁸ Wright, Robert. *Non Zero: The Logic of Human Destiny*. New York: Random House, 2000) 195-196

importance of historical context as well as the authority of traditional museum standards of excellence while claiming that context is the only game in town.⁴⁹

Science writer Leo Marx and literary scholar Roger Shattuck wrote about the Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand" symbolism. Brand stands for potential wrongs in the pursuit of knowledge-for-the-sake-of-knowledge, "the separation of the intellect from the heart."⁵⁰ Brand plans an adventure in communication with an inhabitant of the fire (a devil). Marx points out that Ethan Brand's cohort retreats at dawn, through the iron door of the furnace. The figure of Brand becomes a famous scholar, but when he realizes this separation between his heart and intellect Brand throws himself into the fire. In parallel, the Garden of Eden's story of forbidden fruit can represent knowledge ignoring the mystery inherent in experience; the very reason in the Hebrew tradition the Jewish people do not spell a word to represent G-d.⁵¹ We are advised to respect certain admonitions whether or not we understand them and whether or not we agree with them. Religious admonitions, acquired over many generations of human experience, provide guidelines. In a way it's simple. We are too foolish to handle as much as we are willing to attempt. These symbols admonish hubris.⁵²

We set up propaganda in an attempt to establish interest and appetite (or need, like puzzle pieces) for our technological, artistic, scholarly (etc.) creations. We educate through indoctrination that disarms people of the ability to think through compulsions.

⁴⁹ Munson, Lynn. pp138-142.

⁵⁰ Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000) 265-277. *Forbidden Knowledge: from Prometheus to Pornography*. (NY: St.Martin's Press, 1996) 329

⁵¹ Rich, Tracy R., Judaism 101, Words. The Name of G-d.

<http://www.jewfaq.org/name.htm>

⁵² Shattuck, 330

The most obvious example of this is in “upgrades” to better phones, car rentals, digital games, seats on airplanes, husbands, wives, schools. Viewing human effort as “Art” can help unmask the motives of our own desires and the ways others try to manipulate them. The desire to establish ourselves in our own arenas turns us into self-seeking jerks. An internet meme lately advises people to be careful; that what we love we will become. Loving the power of obfuscation, the power of gatekeeping and hype puts us in danger of becoming like the character Ethan Brand. The association of art and money, the sort of quirky high-end trade shows like Art Basel, museum and gallery showings, book contracts, manufacturing styles suiting certain demographics can keep an artist beholding and addicted to benefits associated with customer appreciation. I may have misunderstood, but years ago I carried around a copy of a book by a Chinese writer named Lin Yutang called *The Importance of Living*. I read his translations of koans about Buddhist monks wandering in the mountains, living poetic lives. I think artists can also serve as examples of people who look at life in ways that keep the heart and mind operating together.

Leonard Shlain’s *Art and Physics* surveys highlights on the forefronts of art over time. Shlain says Picasso, Matisse, Franz Marc and the German Blue Rider group’s use of blue predicts Theo Maiman’s work; the first laser light.⁵³ The shifting perspective in Manet’s paintings broke free from established constraints of several hundred years. According to Shlain, “The wintry ice sheet blanketing Western art and thought began to thaw in the middle of the nineteenth century. Where cracks appeared, inflows began to

⁵³ Shlain, Leonard. *Art and Physics- Parallel Visions in Space, Time and Light*. (William Morrow, New York:1991) 184

erode the reigning Newtonian mind-set and the tyrannical system of perspective.”⁵⁴

Shlain says Cezanne’s paintings indicate an understanding of light that predicts Einstein’s departure from the Newtonian framework.⁵⁵ Marcel Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* and the Cubists work flagrantly made perspective multiple and mobile. To quote Shlain again, “Had Einstein commissioned Duchamp to render diagrammatically what happens to time at nearly the speed of light, the painter could not have achieved a more lucid representation.”⁵⁶

Duchamp claimed found objects, titled them, called them “readymades” and attempted to display them with more traditional art forms. Readymades are only one aspect of Duchamp’s work. With readymades art simply became the choice made by the artist. The choice became a baptism, the baptism something like breaking a bottle of champagne to launch a perception on its voyage. Even if these chosen works now populate the entire body of contemporary art Danto does not emphasize that Duchamp also crafted (other) art objects so that the patience and skill involved in creating their physical form equaled the readymades’ carefully insightful conceptual qualities. In addition to objects, whether made or found, Duchamp entertained himself and others by creating humorous titles for his work. The spirit of Marcel Duchamp haunted years of my life with Marc Johnson, who loved and admired Duchamp’s work and even imagined a meaningful connection between Duchamp’s work titled “In Advance of the Broken Arm” and Marc’s own accidental, yet several times broken arm.

⁵⁴ Shlain, Leonard. *Art and Physics*. 97

⁵⁵ Ibid, 114-115

⁵⁶ Ibid, 210

Roger Shattuck expresses the opinion that the readymades might not belong in the same category as Duchamp's crafted pieces.⁵⁷ Was Duchamp predicting the future of the average person's encounter with art? After all most present-day people choose factory made art for their homes. Duchamp calls a toilet art, maybe the choice implies that art is in the toilet. Although this sounds like a joke, it seems plausible that Duchamp meant exactly that. Shattuck seems convinced that Duchamp played a trickster role, that he was a master of finding advantageous positions from which to disseminate his insights within the critical imagination of the rather newly industrialized world.⁵⁸

9) Visual Education and the Commercial Ethos

The camera may prove less important historically than the printing press to anyone but artists. Wide access to the arts and sciences became easier within the past century than in the history of mankind. Books, print and internet availability, however, does not create desire, tenacity, nor discernment in learning. A recent experiment in India, described over and over on public radio, in a Radio Ted Talk and on YouTube involved an experiment providing computer terminals in impoverished neighborhoods. The computers, set up at child height, used English, a language not known to the children. The experiment took two months, limited subject matter to specific material provided by the facility that installed the computer terminal. This served as an experiment in finding out what the children could learn. The children put forth a great deal of effort to decipher what they saw. They succeeded in teaching themselves English and after understanding that they looked at research pertaining to the role of DNA in disease

⁵⁷ Shattuck, Roger. *Candor and Perversion*. (Norton, New York. 1999) 252.

⁵⁸ Shattuck, *Candor and Perversion*, pp 254-256

processes. The author of the study concludes that students do not need teachers, but simply need scaffolded access to knowledge.⁵⁹

Do the children also need poverty in order to limit them to only one distinctly unusual element in their environment that contains material that is neither as movable nor as ubiquitous as the garbage in their lives (less dangerous than some of the grown people) in order to capture their attention? The Ted Talk on an experiment encouraging child access to computers placed in poor areas of India demonstrates children's capacity for learning on their own. Through experimental discoveries inherent in play and the ready-made conceptual refinement available in great works of art, literature and science, students may learn yet to separate wheat from chaff.⁶⁰ As a teacher I only have my students once a week, which very much affects the choices I make in the work we do. Time consuming work is best suited to classes that children attend every day. We handle materials and work on open-ended projects that can become very involving for those who make them so, and less for those who prefer to graze.

Mayr wrote that biology is its own study; that the terms of physics cannot work for biology.⁶¹ Maybe this is also true for Art. The scientists who write about art approach art theory and art history from the outside. Each discipline is naturally interested in its own language.

⁵⁹ Mitra, Sugata. "The Child Driven Education." Ted Talks
http://www.ted.com/talks/sugata_mitra_the_child_driven_education.html

⁶⁰ See heuristic ideas in works by Howard Zinn, John Holt, John Taylor Gatto, Rudolf Steiner, Reggio Emilia Schools, Waldorf Schools, Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) literature.

⁶¹ Mayr, Ernst. *What Makes Biology Unique? Considerations on the Autonomy of a Scientific Discipline*. (Cambridge University Press: 2004) p84 Ernst says, "thinking about the world, before Darwin, was dominated by physics," that biology did not become a recognized branch of science until the mid 1900's.

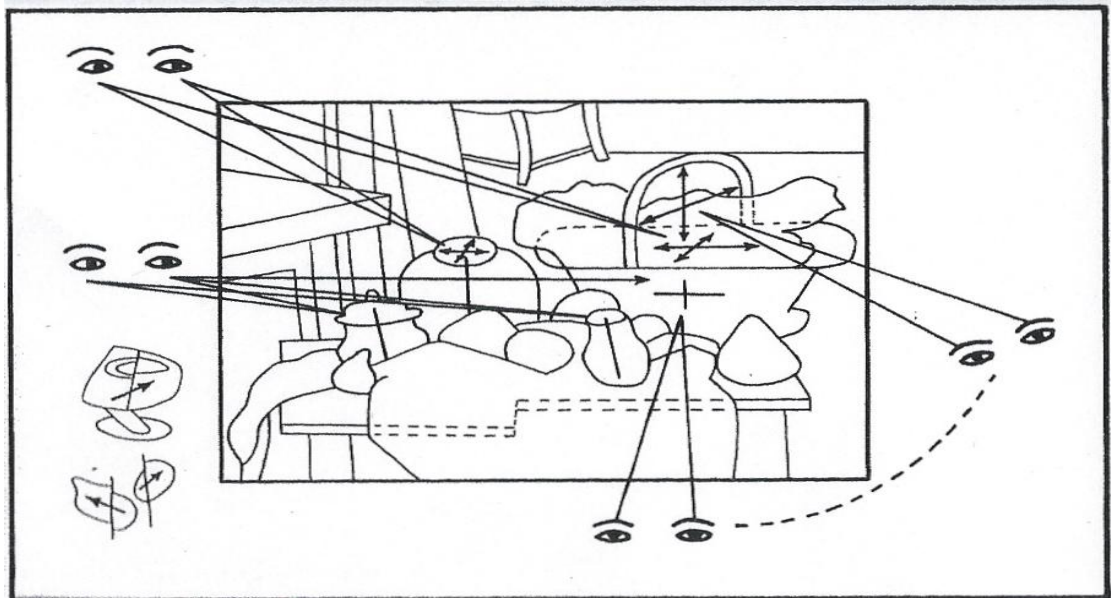


Figure 8.11. Diagram showing how parts of the Cézanne are in correct perspective for eyes situated at different heights and at different angles of observation. From Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Composition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943), Plate 14.

Figure 9 Illustration from *Art and Physics* by Leonard Shlain, p. 117

The illustration (above), from the Shlain book, is meant to show how the point of view changes in a particular Cézanne painting. There's no problem with using the illustration, however, it would be a mistake to confuse the information in an illustration with the experience of seeing the painting or making a painting. We cannot expect an instructive illustration to convey the substantive understanding created by sustained, focused attention on a subject.



Figure 10 Still Life with Fruit Basket Cezanne, Web Museum, Paris.

10) Why Art Exists

Art can address philosophical issues of science, record observations, and give expression to the mysterious. Art and science education of the young remain subject to uninformed opinions. A great deal of contemporary art is made about art, requiring knowledge of its philosophical underpinnings, many people feel intimidated by any effort to understand art and throw in the towel around the time they reach a “my five year old could do it” question. Artists help by making simple written statements about their work. Installations that exist only temporarily manipulate the experiences of willing participants for a few moments of immersion. The exacting processes entailed in acquiring scientific knowledge may seem trustworthy in comparison to thorny ethical issues pointing to moral contradictions in confrontational and controversial political and sexual subject matters that Art takes on in its “Cassandra” role.

According to Arthur Efland in his *A History of Art Education*, educators after World War I attempted to reform schools based on scientific research.⁶² John and Evelyn Dewey's *Schools of Tomorrow* influenced the future of education by attempting to make it more child-centered, less abstract. They considered it a return, in part, to Rousseau's values.⁶³ Rousseau advocated allowing children to follow their interests, he believed that adults typically make the mistake of teaching children what they would learn better on their own and neglecting that which only we can teach them. Students should be taught by experience, not verbally. He also had ideas about love being an inevitable outcome of self-interest and that in order to help children develop their potential teachers must study the individual and allow the child's character to reveal itself.⁶⁴ I have no objection to these ideas. The blanket interpretation of Rousseau that seems held by some is that a wild nature in children must be allowed to rule. I've seen a few instances of parents creating monsters this way. Rousseau's memory of creating his own romantic imaginative society seems part and parcel to the kind of world I find in painting and other art forms.

⁶² Efland, Arthur. *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990) 189

⁶³ Efland, *A History of Art Education*, 189

⁶⁴ Rousseau, Jean Jacques. *Emile*. "On Education."



Figure 11 Man in a Chemical World Cressy Morrison

After World War I chemists sought to improve the public image of their profession. The use of chemical warfare rightfully sullied the public's impression of chemical industry.⁶⁵ We may still resent physicists, chemists and biologists for the roles they've played in everything from inventing mustard gas, nuclear bombs, napalm, nicotine addiction and plant genetics. The bombing of Hiroshima made people distrust the character of scientists. How could people of "genius" lack empathy for the suffering

⁶⁵ Morrison, A. Cressy. *Man in a Chemical World*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937) 31

and fear their work created? “You can’t put the genie back in the bottle” was one common expression about the subject.

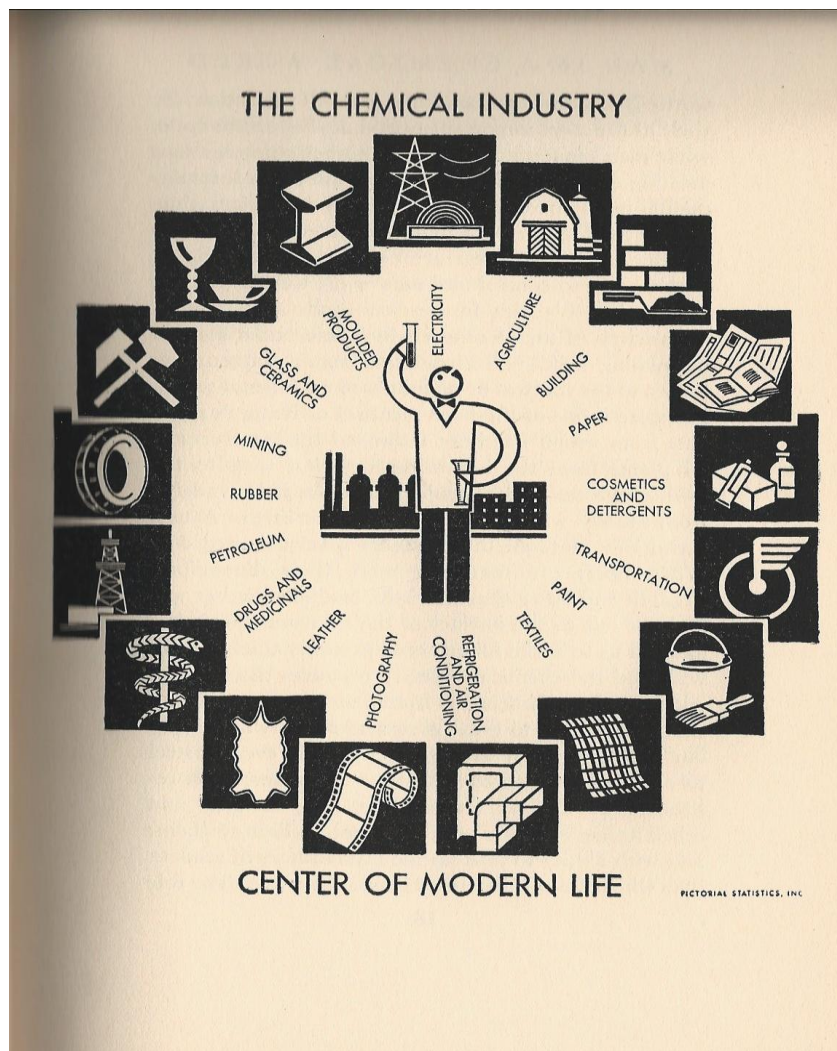


Figure 12 Man in a Chemical World Cressy Morrison

The fact is that artists also assist in spreading the interests of corrupt demagogues. General Motors was a corrupt demagogue that hired sculptors to design the bodies and interiors of the motor vehicles that dominate our lives. Engineers design roads that to accommodate the cars. Architects plan housing that helps facilitate suburban sprawl. We shop stores filled with the products of child labor in search of canned fashion statements.



Figure 13 Bird Brain rules the world! (lyrics from an Alan Ginsburg song) A turkey stands close to the center, casting a discerning look at the viewer. The mom (on the left) is wearing a bird costume. The bird and the snake gather broken modern art shapes on the ground, the sun/flower radiates Easter eggs and little pastel girls stand in its beams. Bunnies stand by to gather the eggs. The painting is self-captioned although hard to read. It says "Wherever you are in the universe it looks like everything is fleeing from you." (I don't know who said it)

School systems form text book adoption committees that promote education fads by choosing highlighted buzz-words over content.⁶⁶

The parents go to work and the children go to school. The experiences of children in school are often unknown by parents. Parents look at grades as though they tell the most important story. The absence of parental control is nothing new in the United States.⁶⁷ Paula Fass quotes the observation of Count Gurowski, "Children accustomed to the utmost familiarity and absence of constraint with their parents, behave in the same

⁶⁶ Jones, Rebecca. *US Textbooks are long on glitz, but where's the beef?* (The Education Digest Feb. volume 66 issue 6, pages 23-30 year 2001)

⁶⁷ Fass, Paula. *Reinventing Childhood After World War II*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 3

manner with other older persons and this sometimes deprives social intercourse of Americans of the tint of politeness, which is more habitual in Europe.” This is no surprise from a European with royal roots. According to Fass, the advent of Dr. Spock’s ideas concerning the importance of child autonomy are a danger signal in the midst of 1950’s home life.⁶⁸ Fass says David Riesman, author of *The Lonely Crowd*, aptly described a social scene in which teenagers do not create individual goals nor learn independence. Instead, schools create “glib conformity”.⁶⁹

Media imagery is emblematic of issues in our society. Imagery devised for the entertainment of children as well as adults has, for many years, conveyed a sense of the American child left to her own devices. Charles Shultz’s Peanuts characters provide a well-known, humorous example; only the children emit intelligible sounds. Matt Groening’s Homer Simpson plays the antihero. The father figure is a lout who watches over the switches and dials in the local nuclear power plant. Homer, rather than representing evil, fits the (often misunderstood) definition of the word antihero. Homer lacks heroic qualities. Public school educators raised a fuss over the Simpsons for years until it appeared that the show was not going away.⁷⁰ We seem unwilling or unable to grow into adulthood in a dignified manner.

American children and their adults stare at screens. Comparing and integrating messages received in school with messages received on screens and outside of school may create something more like schisms than reconciliation. The authority of educational organizing bodies and the authority of multifarious “peer groups” convey divergent

⁶⁸ Fass, *Reinventing Childhood*, 6

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 7

⁷⁰ Irwin, William. *The Simpsons and Philosophy* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001) p216

standards. Languages suit subjects. Subjects, rather than cultures seem to generate languages in “post-cultural” days. Technology, our best friend, generates it’s own languages. The Tower of Babel seems among the most readily applicable biblical symbols today. One role of Art in our lives as individuals is that when we contemplate our choices in the process of creating we assimilate knowledge and make connections between seemingly disparate elements of our lives. Maybe this is why those who are artists per se really “need” to make artwork. I think it’s true for me.

Art teachers, as other teachers, must comply with standards. Guidelines adopted by school systems sometimes force teachers into dilemmas concerning discrepancies between an organizing body’s requirements and underfunded reality. A school may provide a room but no books and no technology at the same time as its organizing body requires proof that teachers incorporate technology in lessons.⁷¹ The ideal of parity between public schools fails regularly and parity from subject to subject often fares worse.⁷²

⁷¹ I cannot imagine that this happened in only one place at only one time.

⁷² I worked for eighteen years at a school in the Diocesan hinterland. The art room was the biggest classroom in the school with a huge wall of north windows and many storage cabinets. The desks were old, oak, black science tables from the fifties. The chairs were heavy oak; there since the wing of the school was built. The students came to art class once a week. The week’s worth of classes were jammed into (two schools) four days’ work. The budget, less than two dollars per child per year for art materials, made material donations important regardless of their practical application. Some years there was no supply money. Parishioners often try to make up for the schools’ failure to provide money for materials and equipment and the parishioners offer an intangible benefit by treating teachers like saints. Saints, not martyrs. The ceremonial practices of the church provide a kind of rhythm and set a contemplative tone in the schools. The freedom to call upon higher order expectations makes teaching in Catholic schools a rewarding, even if challenging experience.

Children want to make art that pertains to their interests. Learning to draw subjects interesting to children requires drawing spontaneously; making mistakes and figuring out how to correct them while children watch the process. The importance of children seeing correction processes cannot be underestimated. The idea that people are suppose to create art spontaneously without revisions is a lot to ask of someone who is learning how to make a sentence and how to tie shoes. Children need a place to work at home. Parents do their children a great favor in stocking an area with paints, paper, pencils, scissors, glue, crayons, play dough and so on. Children need to mess around and produce their own work, something like creating a language of their own, with whatever materials interest them.

People express a range of sentiments about preserving cultures, especially about their right-to-exist regardless of endemic dilemmas. We romanticize cultures that we don't know well. Influential contemporary historian Edward Said, best known for admonishing the Western world's misunderstandings of Asia asserts that western art caricaturizes and treats an immense swath of art as "the other". A similar distinction exists between art created by educated insiders and that by people "outside" art. Art looks at the world taking into account aspects that might not seem to belong together.⁷³ Art is the proverbial canary in a cage. Poor Haeckel, something like poor Nietzsche, did not figure out that the intensity of his opinions were formed outside of his volition by his experience of something as common as grief.⁷⁴ Haeckel's sense of entitlement told him he ought to "have it all." The social lesson may be that even when discoveries astound us we must attempt to place them within whatever scraps of perspective cultural grounding

⁷³ Marx. p241

⁷⁴ Richards. pp453-454

contributes. Haeckel may have fared better if he'd managed to think of his work more along the lines of Shackleton's famous ad for help:

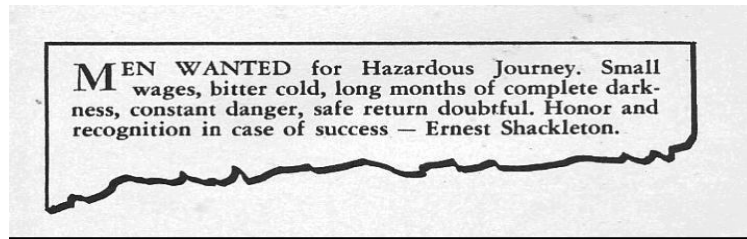


Figure 14 from Julian Watkins's, *The One Hundred Greatest Advertisements*. Reprinted with permission of Dover Publications.

Even if art can predict and express scientific discoveries, scientific discovery is not its reason for existence. Artistic integrity compromised in the service of other disciplines fails to function in its greatest capacity. Art, at its best, provides insight not only to a particular study as an explanation. Instead, art moves ahead to the frontiers of human experience. In the process of taking a stand artists often stumble, or die trying to make it. More often than not, an artist settles somewhere along the way. The unwillingness of art practitioners to risk failure often assures that Art will not make it to any frontier.

A philosopher guilty of commentary, Walter Benjamin tempted readers into the depths of taking-his-word-for-it. Those who lack the lifetime of reading Benjamin devoted to his arguments can barely wade into Benjamin's writing on *The Rigorous Study of Art*.⁷⁵ First, I'll quote someone else to make a point. Jennifer McMahon, in her portion of *The Simpsons and Philosophy*, titled "The Fiction of Fiction: The Heuristic Value of Homer", tells us that philosophers, beginning with Plato in the fifth century B.C., argued

⁷⁵ Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA: 2008) 67-74

over whether or not Art teaches.⁷⁶ Shlain argues that Art not only teaches but predicts intuitively, in Art's own language, scientific understanding in something akin to a pre-conscious form. Benjamin told us we ought to study individual artworks on their own terms rather than in comparison to pre-existing forms; that studying a work of art is not like plant taxonomy. Arnheim agreed with that idea. He was interested in the optical experience of art. Benjamin describes a kind of research that does not attempt large context, research that can get comfortable in the "marginal domains."⁷⁷

Marcel Duchamp invented a sizeable niche for himself that must have seemed, at first, to inhabit a marginal domain. Not identified with the Arts and Crafts movement and yet a practitioner of fine craft, Duchamp decided to fling conceptual works into the art world. People still argue over them. Proponents of the Arts and Crafts Movement stated their cases, created their work and failed to change the industrial world. Not long after their failure Benjamin wrote *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*.⁷⁸ Benjamin began by distilling the meaningful consequences from Art's loss of tradition and aura. Benjamin stated that this loss caused art to retreat into art-for-art's-sake and formed a theology of art.⁷⁹ From this came a sense of purity that led to rejecting social function and any defining "representational content." Art no longer needs to serve ritual. He says, "The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives

⁷⁶ Irwin, William. Jennifer McMahon. *The Simpsons and Philosophy* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001) p216

⁷⁷ Benjamin, Walter. 72

⁷⁸ A short essay, not a book.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA: 2008) 26.

is expanding almost daily.”⁸⁰ Benjamin claims that instead of fulfilling a role in ritual art becomes based on politics.⁸¹ The most touching aspect of Benjamin’s thinking seems evident in a little rhyme from one of his favorite childhood picture books. I have included it after the bibliography because it seems so apropos to the subjects of this paper.

Many Americans still capable of remembering the McCarthy era can only cautiously test the waters of Marxist ideology. However we regard Benjamin’s politics, it is worthwhile considering his ideas concerning technology’s life-of-its-own. He says, for instance,

The discrepancy between the enormous means of production and (their) inadequate use in the process of production (in other words by unemployment and the lack of markets)... Instead of deploying power stations across the land, society deploys manpower in the form of armies.⁸²

Walter Benjamin stayed preoccupied with his studies a bit too long during WWII, tried escaping to Allied territories but found himself trapped and killed himself to avoid capture by the Nazis.

11) The Miraculous Psyche: Representing the Invisible

People expect the miraculous in religion, but even more so in life because we all hope for the best. We cross our fingers, knock on wood, refuse to discuss certain things because of superstitious feelings. Catholicism maintains that devotion requires “faith the size of a mustard seed” and then facilitates miracles. The word “doctrine” from the outside (and often enough from the inside) and the idea of the “doctrinaire” implies a strict application of rules. But doctrine’s flexible, studied attributes provide rules in a

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Walter Benjamin was a Marxist.

⁸² Benjamin, Walter. 42.

theological equivalent of scientific method's adherence to detached observation.⁸³ These world-view standards that include contemplation, prayer, miracles, angels and symbols that fluctuate between the historical "real" and the unconscious mind's "real" readily accommodate a sense of the surreal and lend themselves to art.⁸⁴ Art lends itself to the desire for contributing to the world whether anyone pays attention or not. Art became, for me, a way of asserting myself.⁸⁵

Freud's disparaging point characterizing "oceanic" religious feeling supports a gripe common among agnostics and atheists.⁸⁶ "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the visible world was made out of the invisible" (Hebrews 11.3). Art's role shares similarities to "faith" in the ways that we find art valuable. If our senses produce little in comparison with one aspect of the world, the visible spectrum, how much more do we miss with the rest of our sensory equipment? "Faith implies, therefore, being able to recognize the invisible, by identifying traces of it in the visible world." according to Pope Benedict February 6th, 2013. Just as we see little of the spectrum, only a tiny portion of our awareness entails conscious understanding. Art ventures into the unknown and, at times, brings back evidence of things unseen.

⁸³ Awake in the middle of the night, worrying about my daughter's impending departure for Peace Corps Rwanda, I read on the State Department web site about ambassador Swanee Hunt's visit to Rwanda where she spoke about women in politics and her book on the subject. The name coincidence soothed my soul; with a slightly different spelling the name is that of my daughter's alma mater, Sewanee, University of the South. Coincidences can create a striking, unexplainable sense of reassurance. The inimitable Marc Johnson used to say "That's the Holy Cheesus for ya."

⁸⁴ Dreamlike. Look at Italian holy cards, for instance.

⁸⁵ At home, earlier, I'd written the comment about the mustard seed. As I edited this paragraph The Mustard Seed thrift shop truck drove by on Park Avenue. At that moment it seemed to indicate that my thesis work was headed in the right direction. I realize that this doesn't make sense, but somehow it works anyway.

⁸⁶ Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Hogarth Press, London: 1957) p8

I've experienced confusion over a sense of redundancy in my attempts to write an honest account of my own relationship with art. According to Viktor Frankl, psychiatry considers schizophrenics' attempt to consciously maintain and objectify self-awareness a standard indicator of the disease.⁸⁷ Similar thinking may occur in the somewhat freshly named "Truman Syndrome" in which people imagine they are constantly being filmed.⁸⁸ The decision-making involved in producing artwork puts in observable form that which is meant for communication. If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck etc. In the case of my artwork, if it looks like a mistake, if it is unidentifiable, if it seems to imply that it is an upside down house, a flying seahorse, a dog disguised as a dragon... it is.

In the words of Viktor Frankl, "Psychologism is always trying to unmask. It evades questions of validity as in religious, artistic and scientific fields by escaping from the realm of content to the realm of the act." Psychologism attempts tidying up the unknowable by attributing tight categories of neurotic purpose.⁸⁹ "In every case its efforts to evaluate the intellectual content of psychic acts are in truth efforts to devaluate."⁹⁰

I begin paintings by making brush strokes with colors that attract me and normally combine imagery with abstract elements. I look for potentially representational shapes and balance them visually with colors, lines, three-dimensional illusions of background and foreground.⁹¹ Imagery appears as each painting progresses. They begin to tell stories, although the meaning of the stories is not always immediately apparent. Years ago when my children were little and I wondered what sort of education they might

⁸⁷ Frankl, Viktor. *The Doctor and the Soul*. (New York, Vintage Books, 1983) pp207-209

⁸⁸ Frankl identified this a lot earlier than the current Truman film idea.

⁸⁹ Maybe especially for the actions of others.

⁹⁰ Frankl, Victor. p18-19

⁹¹ Kandel, Eric. P225

have and how I could contribute to it, I learned a little of Rudolf Steiner's work. Waldorf education methods encourage refraining from overly specific imagery in representational art, leaving children free to imagine themselves into it. This idea stuck with me and affects the choices I make in painting. I often substitute cartoon animals for people in colorful phantasmagorical settings with "built in" aesthetic standards and symbolic judgments that have meaning which does not always become apparent until (sometimes years) later. In my opinion, the majority of our knowledge is unconscious.⁹² The combination of acceptable visual properties, whether non-objective, chosen for visual balance, aesthetic, dynamics, or because they look like a duck; painting evokes memories and a sense of fondness for the stuff of memories. My paintings often seem more cheerful and "better adjusted" than I feel.

Sculptor, Louise Bourgeois's words ring true to the way I experience the process of making art:

"My art comes out of problems. How am I going to get rid of this anxiety? How am I going to make myself be loved? I'm interested in structures and strategies for survival. It's that simple. The feelings and problems of today are connected to the past. My art allows me to follow the thread back to the past, which can hold the clue to understanding what is going on today, right here and now. This is the opposite of nostalgia."⁹³

Our shared media experiences create memories; filmmaking, architecture, theme parks, corporate cultures, knick-knacks... paintings, at one time, did this too. When family members gaze upon a set of things for years from a certain position on a couch, as they walk through a door, or lounge on a couch and so on, the objects become standards

⁹² Eric Kandel writes a lot about this sort of thing in great detail from the field of neurobiology.

⁹³ Art 21 Louise Bourgeois (look this up for proper citation)

for normalcy.⁹⁴ Household objects influence and instill values in our hearts and minds. As a child the objects in our house felt eternal, they were constants. We moved and people became part of the past, the objects went with us.

Florida specializes in created environments that set a stage for something like canned memories. We do not seem to think of these theme parks as Art. The lyrics of a song by Renne and Brett Sparks of The Handsome Family create a pathetic example with striking resemblance to a common result of failed Floridian endeavors. One of their songs compares the cathedral in Cologne, “Like a space ship, like the hand of God falling from the sky...” to the experience of hanging out in an empty theme park closed for the season. The Handsome Family’s poetic, gothic ballad poetry of the natural world, suburbia and the post-industrial wasteland jives with my own experience as a child, visiting the asbestos cement and asbestos shingle plants my father managed in industrial neighborhoods in cities of the mid-west and north-east and the amusement parks that seemed the epitome of excitement and fun.

12) How-To?

Watercolor is portable and easy to clean up. I like the brief, un-reworked paintings the best. Even spontaneous looking brushwork in paintings can require a great number of tries. Many paintings by John Singer Sargent with spontaneous looking brush strokes appear un-reworked but actually required many attempts before Singer achieved the effect he desired.⁹⁵ Watercolor materials limit changes. If there are two basic varieties

⁹⁴ Cupchik, Gerald. “A Critical Reflection of Arnheim’s Gestalt Theory of Aesthetics” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts*. 2007, Vol 1, No. 1 p17

⁹⁵ Ratcliff, Carter. *John Singer Sargent*. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1982) p164

of my own work they are the spontaneous, quickly finished sort and the laboriously revised.

I like seeing colors blend and enjoy noticing free-association potential for atmosphere and imagery. I emphasize resemblance, making implied imagery clearer but not usually particularly realistic. The standard I use comes closer to Arnheim's way of thinking about retinal responses to whatever we see than the resemblance standards of Grombrich.⁹⁶ The writing of these two, apparently competed. Both wrote from scientific perspectives and all I can imagine is that my professors must have been more influenced by Arnheim. I enjoy implying resemblance, rather than attempting to paint what a camera does better. The biggest influence on this style of resemblance may have more to do with growing up around Chinese porcelain and carved wooden figures from the Philippine Islands that my grandmother brought home after they were stationed in Manila.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Verstegen, Ian. "Arnheim and Grombrich in Social Scientific Perspective" (Oxford: Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior 34:1, 2004) P92

⁹⁷ My father's family lived on army bases around the US and in several Asian countries in the early nineteen twenties. We have a lot of photos of them in Far East settings.



Figure 15 The carved, wooden figures on the left were made in the Philippines and the porcelain Buddha were brought home from China by my father's mother in the early 1920's. These figures were prized decorative and sentimental figures in our household.

I use watercolor more than other mediums because it's easier to clean up than oil or acrylic. Watercolor paint is transparent. Gouache and casein paints can provide opacity although it feels like cheating and I use it as a last resort. I like keeping the paint transparent, it is more than a nod to the tradition; the paint is transparent. I improvise according to frames of mind – sometimes by painting a whole picture with a single brush, using paint until there is no more color in the brush, making lines and shapes (life-like or not) that hold an interesting aesthetic. I experiment with light and dark qualities, sometimes pertaining to an imaginary light source.



Figure 16 Rose Medallion China, early 1920's.

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How will it look with a layer of each color's opposite to neutralize or mute the colors? What if the original decisions remain in the artwork so that they show after I've changed my mind about their role? "Happy accidents" are an important aspect of the way watercolor works. The color spreads into the water in ways that it is often best not to control. Glazing is also endemic to the medium.⁹⁹

When I reach the end of sensing a next step in a piece of artwork work I move onto something else and go back later. I was more serious and worried about interpreting imagery when I first started painting. I tried to take symbolism literally, to apply it to things happening in my life or see imagery as prophetic, like reading tealeaves. I still feel

⁹⁸ The majority of the paper-thin Rose Medallion china was infamously poorly packed by my grandmother and broken after she'd hauled it around for years and then shipped it to my dad and his brother.

⁹⁹ Applying paint in layers, allowing it to dry between the layers.

that interpretation of symbolism applies to my work, but I don't have a sense, as I did early on, of reading it for prophesy, self-psychoanalysis and revelatory upheaval.

13) Why Do I Paint with Vibrant Color?

It seems, at times, as though I want everything to look like birthday cake. Maybe this fanciful, sugary palette indicates self-indulgent clinging to childhood. I enjoy the juxtaposition of cheerful child-like imagery with more serious experiential content. Not particularly cynical or mocking, the pictures often imply intrigue within bright settings. One childhood memory that I found difficult to resolve had to do with seriousness of my impressions. I remember telling myself, in certain situations, that the adults seemed to think I didn't understand what was going on. Adopting a can-do, cheerful attitude comes from the example of my father. A true Irishman, Daniel Patrick Maloney had a stoic way of carrying on. He often made a joke in the midst of difficult circumstances.

I close my right eye when trying to figure out visual dynamics and balance in paintings. The monocular view flattens perception. The action became more automatic than conscious over the years. It's an example of activity on the verge between autonomic and voluntary. A friend and mentor taught me to do this. I was taught by people who were strongly influenced by modernist interests in flatness, treating paint as paint and not necessarily as a representational tool. One idea in modernism became less about creating resemblance than using paint in a sense that allows qualities of paint itself to become the subject of artwork. Combining representational and non-representational elements, creates atmosphere and the sort of physicality often seen in cartoons and animated film. Sweeping lines can indicate wind, motion, or time. Lines can exist merely to move the viewers' eyes from one place to another. Like many people of my

generation, I found that Saturday morning cartoons were a great pleasure, something to look forward to after the school week. Although I learned how to draw realistically, given free rein I prefer colorful, cartoon-like artwork.

14) Influential People

John and Mary Perts taught me portraiture. Their presence in my life seemed like a miracle. John Perts left Russia as the revolution started. He made his way to Finland where he lived with his brother and his brother's wife, Mary. John Perts first fell in love with Mary when John was ten years old. Mary was twenty years old and betrothed to his brother. John's brother died at 35 of a brain tumor. Five years later, John asked Mary to marry him. They retired in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Perts was the official caricaturist for the Roll Call, the newspaper of congress. He drew senators and congressmen that went out on the wire services and still hang all over Congress. We had an affinity that crossed generations and cultures. Their house was full of artwork. Among the photos were pictures of Mary as a teenager with her classmates, all dressed simply and stylishly in long white dresses in a palace school in St. Petersburg.

I was pregnant with my daughter when the Perts's taught classes at the Art League of Daytona. They liked my work and offered me lessons free of charge. The point was that Perts wanted to pass on his knowledge of portraiture. After Devin was born I carried her to class in a sling. The Perts's invited me to their home to study when they felt they were too old to continue driving. John fixed lunch and we talked for hours. They comforted and offered me sanctuary through a particularly hard phase in life with my husband. The fact that my own artwork, the artwork I liked doing on my own departed so far from the resemblance standards of portraiture felt like a secret after a while. I am not

sure whether I ever confessed it. Whether I did or not, for twenty years I have taught many children what John and Mary Perts taught me.



Figure 17, John Perts, Mary Perts and the author. Art League of Daytona, 1987.



Portrait of Daniel P. Maloney Pastel, 1987 MKMJ



Self Portrait Charcoal, 1987. MKMJ

Devin, at the age of two, loved climbing around on our four-poster bed while I talked on the phone. One day she fell and broke her arm. We rushed to the emergency room and there the orthopedic doctor who was on call was the father of a child Devin's age. He recommended putting her under anesthesia. We did not have insurance so later, when the bills arrived, I asked the surgeon if he would consider trading his fee for artwork. He looked at my slides and chose a painting of a red cat. After our agreement was settled we conversed for a while and realized, to our surprise, that we had John and Mary Perts in common. The doctor's father-in-law and John Perts were in the Foreign Service together in Riga Latvia in the 1920's. The experience of the surgeon accepting artwork for his services meant a lot in and of itself, the Perts coincidence seemed magical. "Divine Appointment."¹⁰⁰

The process, as Dr. Paul Harris aptly described it, of performing a forensic study of my own artwork and its influences, at times, feels as though it amounts to extraordinary objectification. I met Marc, the premier perpetrator of Art my youthful state had ever encountered, when I was nineteen years old. He was from Montana, the Johnsons are a handsome Norwegian and German family with many traits common to the Minnesota characters in Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegone stories. Marc read Samuel Beckett incessantly, he chain smoked, and blasted Lou Reed and David Bowie music in a household of full of vegetarian, peace-nick folkies. He seemed wind-swept and impervious to weather. He made artwork in a casual way as though it meant nothing. To others, his work was very powerful. Marc was (and is) an insightful person, humorous and sometimes cruel, who has suffered for many years with mental health problems. Our

¹⁰⁰ The right expression courtesy of my Reader, Dr. Sharon Carnahan.

children were born into what I knew would be a precarious genetic and social milieu. Their father struggled with alcoholism, manic-depression and an array of undiagnosed issues. Early in our life together I did not understand that his problems were not exactly going away. Marc seemed to think others intuited his thoughts. When he sensed disagreement he became angry. Disagreement was, at times, evident to Marc in any expression that indicated existence outside of his own. Breathing, for instance.

I left when I became willing to face whatever consequences might ensue; otherwise the fakery necessary to create a public façade of normalcy would isolate and trap us. I divorced Marc when I was thirty-eight years old; we'd been together half my life. He influenced my artwork most in the decisive spontaneity with which he drew and painted. He lived a wild life for a few years, rode box cars to Montana, lived above a famous punk rock venue named CBGB's in New York City for a couple of summers and got himself into plenty of serious trouble in art school. I admired him for many years as a person unlike me, who risked rejection. Our relationship seemed to come about by "Divine Appointment." Eventually I reached my limit. I got a job teaching art, converted to Catholicism, sought and received an annulment and raised our children. The children grew up and are finding their way in interesting directions. My mother and I, when she became very old, sat together many evenings and marveled over the fact that things turned out so well despite a long, difficult beginning.

15) The Intentional Fallacy

My pictures create their own logic as I paint them. People interpret paintings, as each individual's mind's eye is not the same as the camera. Our hearts and minds, laden

with habits and personal experiences, construe meaning accordingly. Arnheim said that an artist is “no less obliged to do justice to the facts than is the scientist, except that the artist’s own view of the subject is included in the conception to be represented.”¹⁰¹

Arnheim recognized in Picasso’s collages the flexibility of resemblance.¹⁰² Flexibility of resemblance became an interesting task in my painting life early on and remains one of the main experimental devices I enjoy for symbolism in painting. Examples among the illustrations include combined symbols of umbrellas and dresses in figure 24, the object sitting before the irritated monk in figure 41 could be a laptop, a bowl of food or a singing bowl and the object on the beach in figure 51 that triples as a cake, Roman ruins and a sand castle. Blatant use of such devices happens everywhere in media experiences so that products placed within representational contexts that evoke important and memorable milestones in life are served to us as in a dream.

My snarky, youthful self figured artists who desire fame gravitate to cities. I did not realize that a city’s atmosphere could also prove worthwhile.¹⁰³ Distinguishing features of contemporary life such as instantaneous sharing of words and imagery creates conditions for artists unlike any time in the past. I figured I could live in a beach town and my artwork can be as accessible and worthwhile as that of artists in the cities.

Foolhardy. Instead, I became a hermit.

¹⁰¹ Arnheim, Rudolf. *To the Rescue of Art: Twenty-Six Essays*. (University of California Press:1992) p4

¹⁰² Rothman, Roger. “Arnheim’s Lesson: Cubism, Collage and Gestalt Therapy.” (The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism. 65:3, Summer 2007) p296

¹⁰³ Gatherings of like-minded people, the physical presence of museums and galleries, public art, music, outstanding architecture, walkable neighborhoods with businesses and restaurants, for instance.

16) Conclusion

Modernism's Formalist standards implied that it might make as much sense to say that lines connected and curled in various ways ought not represent sounds and that sounds ought not represent meanings but stand as sounds independent of interpretation. Marks on paper immediately create a sense of three-dimensionality and our task is to construe what from them? Something about them must be worthwhile. Something about the qualities of artistic products must be discernible. Not that they imitate life but that we naturally interpret the experience of considering artwork.

Art and Science education of the young remain subjected to uninformed opinions. Adults lacking both practical skills and discernment in the visual arts typically pass incompetence on to children as though the problem is a charming anomaly resulting from an unseen hand doling out more talent to some and less to others. William Blake, according to Shlain, "declared that every man who is not an artist is a traitor to his own nature."¹⁰⁴ Saturation in media environments indoctrinates people and disarms our ability to think through our opinions and our compulsions. Flexibility of resemblance works not only in the small world of painted images but in the large media environment that conflates sentiment with material goods and important milestones with products for purchase. We are so accustomed to factory made art that the manufactured seems more natural than art made by hand.

There is no ultimate point in questioning whether works of art ought to exist, nor in insisting that we understand the specifics of their meaning. They exist and we interpret them. We decide what we want to identify with, although, often our decisions are not our

¹⁰⁴ Shlain, Leonard. *Art and Physics*. (New York: William Morrow, 1991) 95

own. Art as propaganda for business and politics fits rather seamlessly into our lives. It is not necessary to thoroughly understand how cars work in order to drive. Art speaks its languages whether anyone bothers interpreting meaning or not. We cannot always accurately discern our own intentions, the percentages of every motive in the array of intentions, the strength of intentions in ourselves nor in others. We are subject to many unfathomable personal qualities; arrogance, ineffectuality, humility, bravery. The religions seem best at identifying our distinguishing features.

In *Moby Dick* Melville uses the image of an implacable machine to express Ahab's pride in dominating the *Pequod's* crew. The creed of the age of machinery, Carlyle said in "Signs of the times," is fatalism: by insisting upon the force of circumstances, men argue away all force from themselves, until they 'stand lashed together, uniform in dress and movement, like rowers of some boundless galley.'¹⁰⁵

The biblical idea that man is made in the image of God implies that we are primarily creators. Many "first world" people in the arts attribute creative power to the self. Educated people often imagine in other cultures that which they disdain as mental and cultural foolishness in their own societies. We appreciate an exotic sense of the sacred, in my opinion, mostly because it is exotic. Assuming that religious concepts hold enduring meaning only in places where we are less familiar with a society's hypocrisy seems silly. Placing our obligations as individuals in perspective, efforts to understand our experience bring to mind key similarities between the role of the artist and the role of God. We create meanings of our own. Creativity may be our neglected human destiny and duty. I

¹⁰⁵ Marx, Leo. p286

like to believe that “made in the image of God,” means our fundamental nature is creative.

In front of the little town, there sits a little dwarf,
 Behind the little dwarf, there stands a little mountain,
 From the little mountain, there flows a little stream,
 On the little stream there floats a little roof,
 Beneath the little roof, there stands a little room,
 Inside the little room there sits a little boy,
 Behind the little boy there stands a little bench,
 On the little bench there rests a little chest,
 In the little chest, there stands a little box,
 In the little box, there lies a little nest,
 In front of the little nest there stands a little cat,
 That's a lovely little place, I'll make note of that.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA: 2008) 227
 From an old picture book [Hobby-Horse and Doll], by J.P. Wich (Nordlingen, 1843)

17) Artwork and Comments



Figure 18 Sad Faced Clown. Watercolor, 1978. Mary K Maloney

cThe image of the face of a baby clown lying back, looking helpless, visually switches back and forth with an overly discerning female face, narrowing one eye, looking toward the viewer with an intimidating stare, her eye both hidden and emphasized behind part of a floating red mask passing by. Implied motion swirls above and around the baby clown face; moving counter clock-wise, the clown face looks frightened and passive. The gaunt female face looks downward toward the motion and through the motion toward the viewer. The images happen both simultaneously and alternately. Shapes of color resemble various things including cave painting imagery. This was the first watercolor painting I made in Ft. Wayne before starting art school. I feel now that this visually represents the two poles of the dilemma I was in with the artist I eventually married. On the one hand the relationship tapped into my own vulnerable, infantile qualities and also brought out a dead serious, fierce observer of the proceedings.



Figure 19 Little Girl Martyr, Watercolor, casein and pastel (no date) MKMJ

Surrounded by windy wavy blue, an upside down boat, a swan and a mask, a stick figure girl, with her arms outstretched looks like she's hanging on a cross. Her feet are olives; olives, as in a feature of martinis. Martinis were a popular drink among adults at our house. We always had a sign in the kitchen saying "Martini Spoken Here." Our British neighbor, John L. Knight, world traveller, liked singing praises (after he'd had a few) in grand pronouncements about Daddy's martini mixing expertise. This painting was done at The Velvet Monkey, an art studio space shared by a group of artists who originally met at a gallery co-op that we shared on Main Street in Daytona Beach. Not long after painting this I began teaching for the Catholic schools.



Figure 20 Preparatory sketches and photo of The Nut Gatherer parts, 1995. MKMJ

Nut Gatherer

An exercise in semiotics. Savannah College of Art and Design holds summer classes for art teachers. The sculpture professor gave each teacher 20 dollars to spend at the hardware store. I bought a nut gatherer, an angled vent connection, a copper mesh pot scrubber, four spring and rubber tipped door stoppers, one for each corner of the vent, clear orange-red carpet protector and used a car wheel from the studio junk pile. Each component acted as one or more symbol. The vent looked like a cowboy hat. The top of it was open except for the copper pot scrubber, which was opened, spread across the narrower opening of the vent and sewn onto its edges. The “copper” acted as a play on words- meant to represent the super ego. The “hat” represented voluntary action (wearing a hat, something like an occupation) and “venting”. The nut gatherer represented my lifetime tendency to accumulate crazy friends. The hat was wearable, the handle end of the nut gatherer stuck into the center of the wheel, and was easily removed for gathering nuts in May.



Figure 21 Low-tech Robot Toy, 2009. MKMJ

Robot Toy for Elizabeth Faison

One evening I called to vicariously enjoy my daughter's college life. A group of close friends lived in a suite together. Several knitted. One yelled across the room "I'm going to knit you a robot" and I, in turn, vowed I'd make one for her. My robot began with a wood block painted in silver and gold acrylic made mobile with Ace hardware TV cart wheels. I carved a flower shape and set, in the center, a super strong magnet, disguised the magnet's presence with black glitter, made a stuffed, silver lame pill-shaped robot body with moveable and removable parts including a magnetic ruffled eye patch (pirate attire, not shown). The body of the robot has magnets at either end with no right side up nor up-side down. The robot's demeanor changes according to the direction in which he is attached to the wheeled base. He looks grim one way and friendly the other. He has flat chrome coat buttons for eyes.



Figure 22.. Peg-legged Man on the Beach. Watercolor, 1997 . MK Maloney Johnson

Pirate on the Beach

The Peg Legged Man on the Beach walks along the edge of the water with his arms held out, shoulder height, parallel to the ground as though for balance and spectacle. His arms are wavy and curve like snakes. A third snake comes out of the top of his head. In the distance, behind him, three beach umbrellas form dressed female mannequin figures; wearing three identical formal Barbie dresses. The bodice of each dress forms a heart shape. The scene looks pleasant, resembles a residential beach nearby, north of Route 40.

The colors are cheerful and the snake man is simultaneously silly and dangerous. Walking, presumably moving on toward further conquest in the direction of the viewer, the painting makes light of the serial exploits of my former husband. The dress/umbrellas seem similar to staking a flag over conquered land. This is a fanciful portrait of a key figure in my life, Marc Johnson.



Figure 23 Two Girls with a Monitor Lizard Watercolor and casein, 1997. MKMJ

Two Girls with a Monitor Lizard

Two girls stand in a tide pool on the beach on either side of the lizard, leaning across and hugging the lizard like a pet. Sunrise. Odd flower stems come out of the sand of a tide pool. Only one flower is blooming out of seven or eight green stems. A sheath of red is draped over the lizard's head like a shawl. The lizard is huge and seems potentially dangerous. The girls represent my sister and me. I wonder if the giant lizard is a symbol of the dangerous repercussions of the unresolved war related issues of our mother. Mama hung it next to her bedroom door for years.



Figure 24. Baba Yaga and Girl on the Beach. Watercolor and casein (no date) MKMJ.

Baba Yaga and Girl on the Beach

Painted on hot press watercolor paper, a very smooth and unforgiving surface. I added casein paint to make the cabana and the water. Baba Yaga leans over smiling, pleased, handing something to a grown, purple and green bikini-clad young woman reclining on the beach with her back to the viewer next to a striped beach cabana. A man wearing a hat floats by. When I was young and my parents retired here I used to walk on the beach and always visited with an old Armenian lady whose grown, middle-aged daughter lived in a house at the beach approach. Mrs. Abkarian was friendly and interested in talking. She'd been chosen by her husband amongst a huge line of women waiting for food and water during incidents involving T.E. Lawrence in Turkey during World War I. I think I turned her into a friendly Baba Yaga.



Figure 25 Little Pal. Watercolor, 1997. MK Maloney Johnson

Little Pal

A girl with no facial features and a big, crazy hair-do stands wearing a dress and socks without shoes, by a smoking red barbecue grill on a concrete bench on the front porch. The name of the grill is Little Pal. My dad always called me Little Pal. This reminds me of running around the house with socks on, the fun of sliding across the polished floor.

This is a simple, spontaneous watercolor.

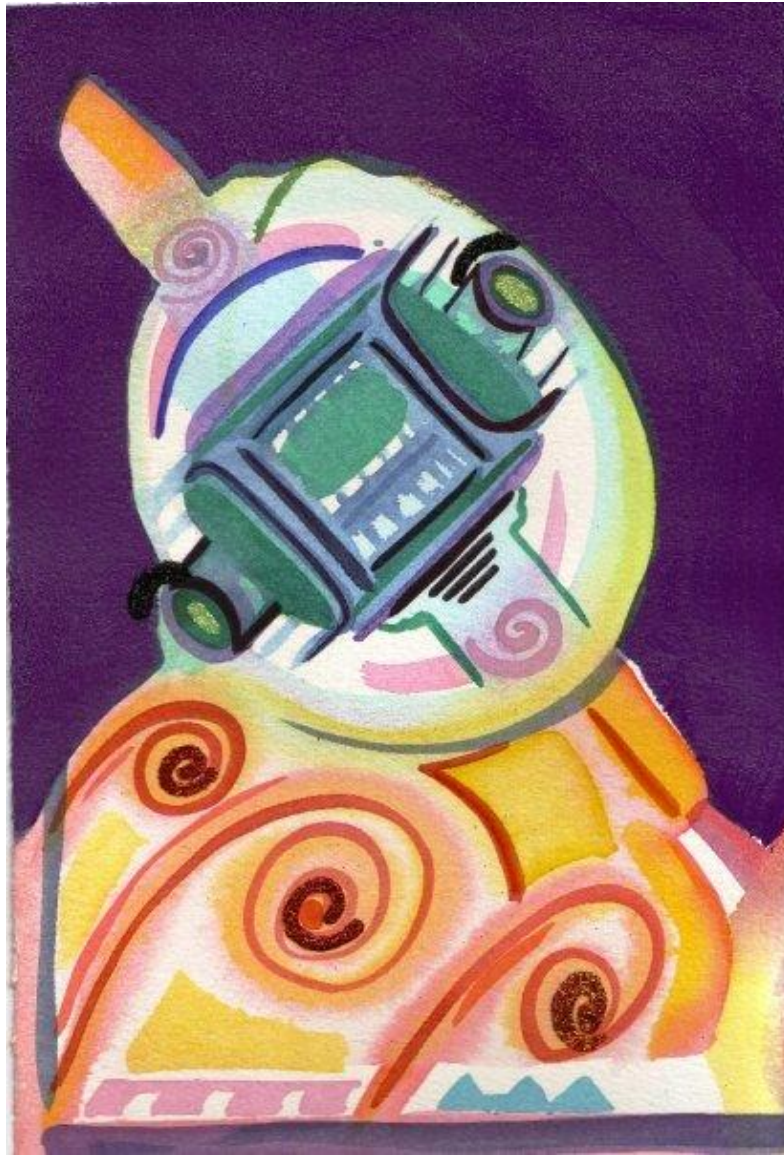


Figure 26 Witty Robot. Watercolor and Acrylic, 2009. MKMJ

Robot

Three comical young guys stood near the doorway of a college house party. Each held a lit candle. Stevie and I saw each other and started dancing. For the remainder of the year I fended off his affections. His mother had been successfully suicidal and he suffered. I reminded him of her, or it seems as though I was a potential substitute. I couldn't shake him loose. I painted a picture of a robot recently and it looked like Stevie's face. Stevie asked to buy it. I sold it to him for twenty bucks after some hilarious banter.



Figure 27 Chrysalises and Ominous Birds, Watercolor. 2006 (date approximate) MKMJ

Chrysalises in a Hammock with Ominous Birds and Tiny Dancing Girls

A clearing in the trees with a hammock holding two giant chrysalis figures, far too big for the ominous birds to eat, but the birds are still ominous anyway. Tiny girls are dancing in a row. One tiny colorful bird flies toward the hammock scene. This is the back yard of the house where I raised my children, a half block from the ocean, with undeveloped lots on the side and back and some neighbors who'd lived there for many years, where we planted shade trees that grew over the house, buried pets that died and held barbeques, pot lucks and birthday parties.



Figure 28 School Girl Back Stage, Daydreaming. Watercolor and gouache. (no date) MKMJ.

School Girl Back Stage Day Dreaming

A girl immersed in a daydream, turned away from the audience and slightly toward the viewer, looking up, staring into space beginning a letter to Santa, an apple on the school desk, sitting behind a stage curtain. The girl's imaginings form a large headdress above and to the sides of her head. A man with his back to the viewer, also sitting, but in a chair without a desk in front of the curtain, leans on his right elbow, looks comfortable facing the crowd. The audience is celebrating. The picture is over-painted, very "tight" and irritatingly close to my tendency to hide in my own backstage world and daydream.



Figure 29 Barge, Phoenix and DPM. Watercolor collage, 2012. MKMJ.

Barge, Phoenix and Daddy

The horizontal piece with a smoke stack reminds me of barges on the Mississippi. We lived outside of St. Louis when I was a child. Daddy worked as plant manager for an asbestos cement company. He worked for the same company across the US for forty-five years. Years earlier, before I was born, Daniel P. Maloney lived in New Orleans where he and my mother met at an officers' club after World War II and danced many a night away. The name Barge was also that of a good friend of my dad's in New Orleans. Inspired by their surroundings, they spelled Barge with an accent on the "e" and my father thenceforth signed his name Dan'l.



Figure 30 Me and my Dad Walking. Watercolor (no date) MKMJ

My father was, he and my mother liked to say, “a family man,” who worked hard, loved his family and put up with his beloved, heroic wife, Julia Rogers Maloney. He was a chemical engineer by training who lived as a bachelor until he was almost forty years old. DPM was outnumbered by three females in the house and forced to ally himself with the only other male, a dog named Smokey Joe. Daddy referred to Smokey as a “brute.”



Figure 31 DPM, New Orleans, 1951.

Words or Price, 2013

The following paintings came about when I felt like the thesis process had hardly a life beyond wandering aimlessly, reading through art subject matter. I wanted to make paintings with only transparent watercolor. I was not aware of any other intentions, except that I was thinking about education; especially the materials involved in teaching children. Worksheets are a common device in teaching primary students. Papers with pictures have blank lines under them on which students identify subjects with words. I figured there are many varieties of this even for older students who must choose from equations to identify formulas, or choose among sentences one that best describes an image or a written math problem. I painted these odd conglomerations with vaguely identifiable elements and styles in a similar fashion. Some of the imagery is flexible and can be imagined as more than one image. Some have talk bubbles that might alternately be used as price tags (like the TV show, *The Price is Right*). Instead of lines for filling in blanks, some have water under them or stacks of horizontal pastel stripes.



Figure 32 Name the Imitation Asian Contraptions. Watercolor, 2013. MKMJ



Figure 33 Word(s) or Price Name the Figure. Watercolor, 2013. MKMJ



Figure 34 Floating Elephant Tomato Contraption Etc. Watercolor, 2013. MKMJ



Figure 35 Bird About to Jump from an Etruscan Horse Treasure Box and so on.

Watercolor, 2013. MKMJ



Figure 36 Flexible Imagery Floating Objects. Watercolor 2013. MKMJ



Figure 37 Fan Dancer, Deer Guarding Treasure Box. Watercolor, 2013. MKMJ



Figure 38 Fan Dancer and Discombobulated Mom. Watercolor, 2013. MKMJ

Fan Dancer and Discombobulated Mom (the object stares back) 2013

A portrait on the wall looks out at a cartoon woman dressed as a fan dancer who wears sunglasses the same color as the portrait's frame. Nearby a scribbly mother struggles with a bundle of something in one arm while reaching for a child sprawled on the floor in a tantrum. These elements represent competing aspects of my own history. The framed face on the wall looks out at people in a museum. The lady in dark glasses, flamboyantly dressed, with feathers and shawl, whose face is green, behaves as though she is the art show. The portrait on the wall appears as though the art is studying life as if the past, lives and looks out, more real than the living figures in the room. The three figures can be categorized like this: The portrait seems observant, the green lady showy, cold, ridiculous and self-absorbed. The awkward young mom glances toward the artwork, distracted by her obligations, reaching down toward a child in the midst of a tantrum, carrying an unwieldy unidentifiable something- she's glancing back at the painting on the wall. The portrait in a gilded frame looking can represent my take on art looking at two realities; one with prejudice toward the flamboyant, somewhat sinister woman in green who hides behind sunglasses is a fan of art (fan dancer). The scribbly pastel mom with kid and parcel looks slightly pensive. It seems I painted the flamboyant art fan with a bit of resentment and my own scribbly single mom figure more sympathetically. A search through photos recently proved to me that this fan dancer came from a card my father sent my mother in 1951.



Figure 39 Irritated Monk, Watercolor and Casein, 2013. MKMJ

Irritated Monk with Singing Bowl or Laptop.

The monk looks irritated. He's looking at the rear end of a dog wearing a beret. A white ghost dog is in the sky. A duck observes the monk and quietly says "As if." A very tiny dog is splashing through the water behind the duck.



Figure 40 Detail of Irritated Monk

Little Girl Venus (2012)
She looks like a wooden peg toy.

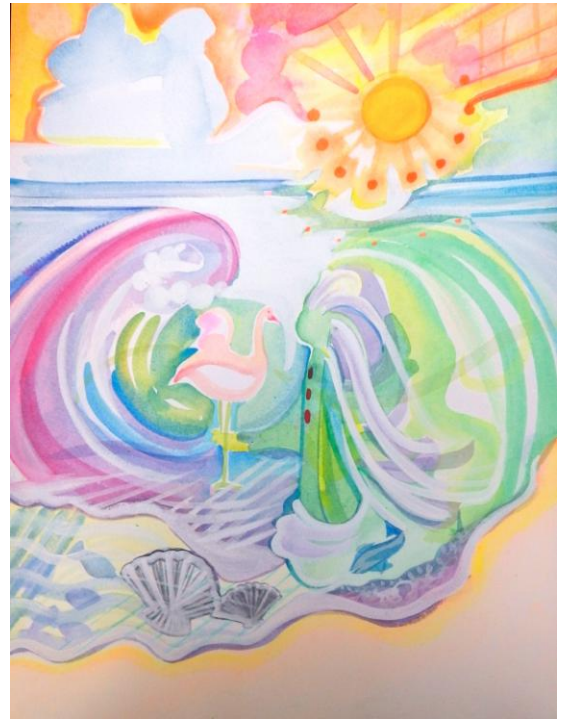


Figure 41 Little Girl Venus Watercolor and Casein, 2013. MKMJ

Girl, Snakes and Talking Tree, 2011

The snake and tree imagery originally came from a dream about making my way through a mountainous jungle with my mother and sister. The jungle was full of snakes falling from the trees, and surrounded a valley with a town. I fell into the town, which was open and clear and at its center stood a bank with marble steps. I was distressed, not only because of the jungle experience but because I heard that the small farmers had no place to sell their milk. I asked someone on the steps of the bank what the farmers do with the milk and he said “They throw it away.”



Figure 42 Snakes Falling from the Trees. Watercolor, 2011. MKMJ

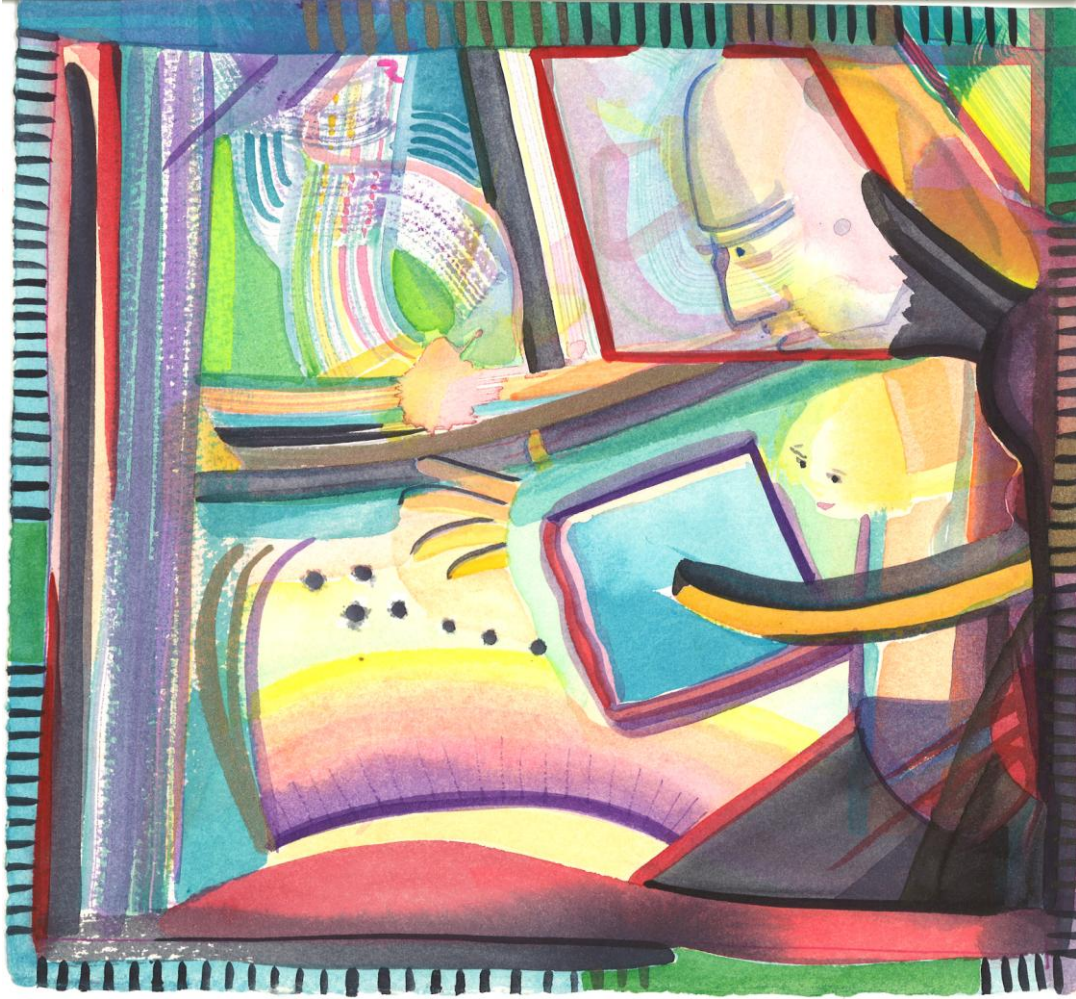


Figure 43 Clean Room. Watercolor (no date). MKMJ

Clean Room

Looking, with my dad, into a clean room. My sister and I used to go to the plant once or twice a year with our dad, although none of the plants ever involved a clean room. Our father was a chemical engineer by training. When images of industrial clean rooms began appearing in the media years ago I always thought of my father. When we visited plants he showed us around, walked us through the factory, showed us the machinery and introduced us to people. This image only loosely fits imagery akin to a clean room, but even so, I always think of this painting that way.



Figure 44 Angel's Hand on the Scientist's Head Watercolor and Casein (no date). MKMJ

Angel's Hand on the Scientist's Head

The scientist is looking into a mad science contraption. The picture could be displayed with the science fiction film sound of a Theremin, the sound of the space ship in *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. I was happy to learn that when Rudolf Arnheim began work at the Psychological Institute at the University of Berlin the lab was in two floors of the Imperial Palace. Arnheim said, “with angels painted on the ceiling and the marble bathtubs of the court ladies standing in these rooms, and that’s where we did our experiments.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Behrens, Roy. “Rudolf Arnheim: The Little Owl on the Shoulder of Athene” (MIT Press, *Leonardo*, Vol 31, No.3 (1998), pp. 231-233



Figure 45 Dr. Who, Stormy and Big Haired Clown Girl Observers Watercolor, 2013. MKMJ



Figure 46 Bucking Cow Catcher. Watercolor, 2013. MKMJ



Figure 47 Chemical Sled. Watercolor with glitter and casein (no date). MKMJ

Chemical Sled

Over the years I have often drawn women without arms coming through doorways. I think it has to do with a sense of powerlessness. This particular painting seemed to be about love and sex. The little person with the heart full of love is blindfolded and does not seem particularly male or female, the tall black haired woman has an arm now (she didn't at first) but ended up with a mermaid's tale, which hobbles her. The female torso on the sled seems armless.



Figure 48 Bird Wallpaper and Chinese Chair. Watercolor and gouache, 2011 MKMJ

Bastardization of Asian art with Henry Moore Curtains



Figure 49 Portrait of Pearl E. May Lounging by the Lollypop. Watercolor (no date) MKMJ

Portrait of Pearl E. May Lounging by the Lollypop

A Roman building triples as a sand castle and wedding cake. This is an example of flexible meaning in imagery. Pearl E. May's face both reads and looks at the viewer. Dogs, birds and cats are hiding shapes of the leaves.



Figure 50 Dr. Seuss, Olive Oil, Barbie, Mermaid Watercolor (no date) MKMJ

Dr. Seuss, Olive Oil, Barbie, Mermaid (no date)

The painting shows a roly poly little girl next to a (very popular at the time) "Totally Hair Barbie" who is also a mermaid and is watching TV. This represents the contrast between a pre-school girl and her imaginings.



Figure 51 Stormy Disguised as a Dragon, Watercolor with glitter. 2010, MKMJ

Stormy Disguised as a Dragon (2010)

Stormy is a Tibetan Terrier. His entire name is Rainbow's Dazzlin' Stormy Sky. The people who adopted him could not show him and decided not to keep him because he is a dwarf. The breed is called the Holy Dog of Tibet. Traditionally they were only given away, never sold because they were considered part of the family, more like children than pets. Tibetan Terriers were companions to the monks. The breed is 2000 years old. I find him inspiring and I like to put him in paintings.



Stormy

In a pile of igetenge (fabric) my daughter sent home while serving in Peace Corps Rwanda.

In front of the little town, there sits a little dwarf,
 Behind the little dwarf, there stands a little mountain,
 From the little mountain, there flows a little stream,
 On the little stream there floats a little roof,
 Beneath the little roof, there stands a little room,
 Inside the little room there sits a little boy,
 Behind the little boy there stands a little bench,
 On the little bench there rests a little chest,
 In the little chest, there stands a little box,
 In the little box, there lies a little nest,
 In front of the little nest there stands a little cat,
 That's a lovely little place, I'll make note of that.¹⁰⁸

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The Ad and the Ego, Video, directed by Harlod Boihem (1996: San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel)

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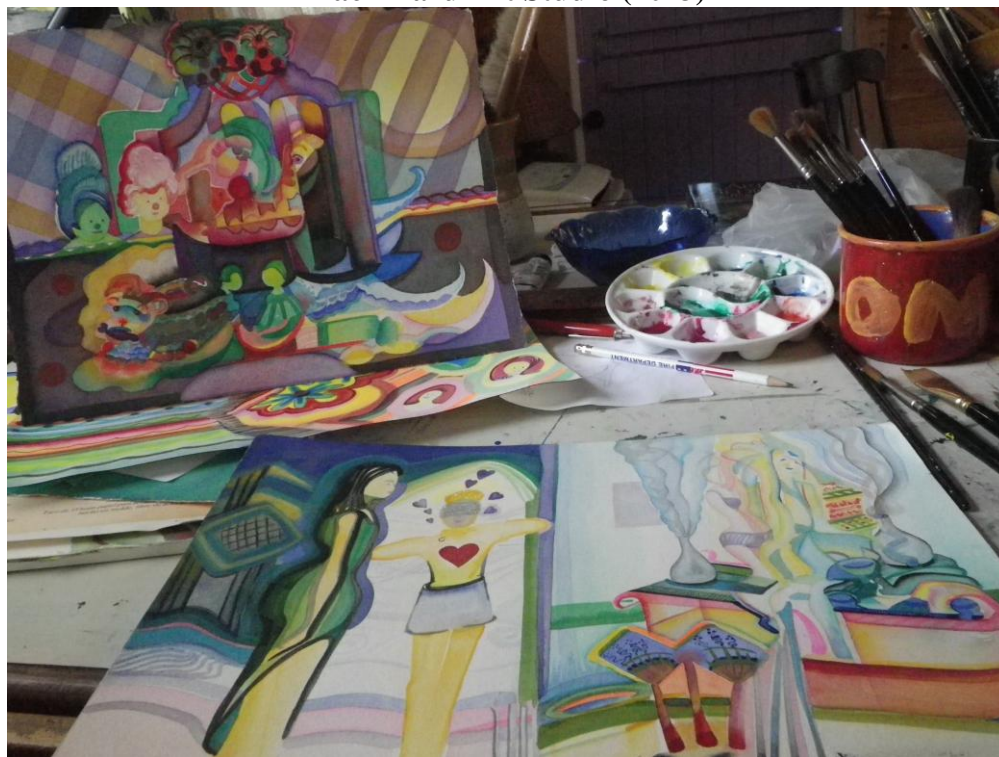
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On my honor, I have not given, nor received, nor witnessed any unauthorized assistance on this work.

Mary K. Maloney Johnson

Appendix

“To some of us the Owner of the World has apportioned the gift to tell their fellows that the time to get up has finally come. To others He gives the eagerness to rise when they hear the call; to rise with racing blood put on their garbs of war and go to the boundary of their town to invade the invading enemy boldly in battle. And then there are those others whose part is to wait and when the struggle is ended, to take over and recount its story. The sounding of the battle-drum is important; the fierce waging of the war itself is important; and the telling of the story afterwards – each is important in its own way. I tell you there is not one of them we could do without. But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle feather I will say boldly: the story. Do you hear me? Now, when I was younger, if you had asked me the same question I would have replied without pause: the battle. But age gives to a man some things with the right hand even as it takes away others with the left...

“So why do I say that the story is the chief among his fellows? The same reason I think that people sometimes will give the name Nkolika to their daughters- Recalling-Is-Greatest. Why? Because it is only the story that outlives the sound of the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighter. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us. It is the thing that makes us different from cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their neighbors...

“So the arrogant fool who sits astride the story as though it were a bowl of foo-foo set before him by his wife understands little about the world. The story will roll him into a ball, dip him in the soup and swallow him first. I tell you he is like the puppy who swings himself around and farts into a blazing fire with the aim to put it out. Can he? No, the story is everlasting... Like fire, when it is not blazing it is smouldering under its own ashes or sleeping and resting inside its flint-house.

“When we are young and without experience we all imagine that the story of the land is easy, that every one of us can get up and tell it. But that is not so. True, we all have our little scraps of tale bubbling in us. But what we tell is like the middle of a mighty boa which a foolish forester mistakes for a tree trunk and settles upon to take his snuff... Yes, we lay into our little tale with wild eyes and a vigorous tongue. Then, one day Agwu comes along and knocks it out of our mouth and our jaw out of shape for our audacity and hands over the story to a man of his choice... Agwu does not call a meeting to choose his seers and diviners and artists: Agwu, the god of healers; Agwu, brother to Madness! But although born of the same womb he and Madness were not created by the same *chi*. Agwu is the right hand a man extends to his fellows; Madness the forbidden hand. Madness unleashes and rides his man roughly into the wild savannah. Agwu possesses his own just as securely but has him corralled to serve the compound. Agwu picks his disciple, rings his eye with white chalk and dips his tongue, willing or not, in the brew of prophecy; and right away the man will speak and put head and tail back to the severed trunk of our tale. This miracle-man will amaze us because he may be a fellow of little account, not the bold warrior we all expect nor even the war-drummer. But in his

new-found utterance our struggle will stand reincarnated before us. He is the liar who can sit under his thatch and see the moon hanging in the sky outside. Without stirring from his stoll he can tell you how commodities are selling in a distant market-place. His chalked eye will see every blow in a battle he never fought. So fully owned by the telling that sometimes- especially when he looks around him and finds no age-mate to challenge the claim- he will turn the marks left on him by the chicken-pox and yaws he suffered in childhood into bullet scars... yes, scars from that day *our men* pounded *their men* like palm fruit in the heavy mortar of iroko!”

The tense air was broken suddenly by loud laughter. The old man himself smiled with benign mischief.

“But the lies of those possessed by Agwu are lies that do no harm to anyone. They float on the top of the story like the white bubbling at the pot-mouth of new palm-wine. The true juice of the tree lies coiled up inside, waiting to strike...”

From Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*